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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



KATE THREW HERSELF ON HER KNEES. "TELL HER, DEAR RICHARD, THAT I AM YOUR LAWFUL WIFE!" SHE SAID.

A VILLAGE BELLE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"THAT'S an uncommonly pretty girl. Who is she, landlord? I mean the one who is holding the bride's flower at this moment!" remarked a dark, gentlemanly young fellow to his host, the proprietor of the hotel.

"I should rather think she is pretty! Why, sir, she's our village beauty; she was Queen of the May last year. There isn't another to touch her from here to Johnny Groat's, and she's as good as her looks, too!"

"Where does she live, and what is her name?" interposed the gentleman, somewhat impatiently, and with a haughty inflection in his voice that stopped Mr. Boniface's garrulomeness in a second.

"Her name, sir, is Kate Karson, and that is the way to her cottage, just round there by the mill. She lives all alone with her mother, who is a widow; her husband was a sea captain, and was drowned at sea," he replied, respectfully.

"Thanks! Then this little rustic beauty lives in that cottage by the right hand side of the mill!" he said, half aloud.

"That's it, sir. It is called 'Willow Cottage,' because of the willows that grow in the garden," cut in Mr. Boniface.

He waited to hear no more, but hastened out to join the group of villagers that lined the pathway to the porch.

It was a pretty sight; the fair girl-bride, clad in simple white muslin, leaning on the arm of her stalwart young bridegroom, amid the array of maidens who strewed bright flowers at her feet.

But notwithstanding that all eyes were eagerly devouring the pretty bride, the gentleman, who strolled out from the "Bear" opposite, could look only at one out of the group of blushing

maidens, and that one completely enthralled his attention.

"Rosebud of the garden of girls," he said to himself, as the wedding party passed out of the old churchyard, with its moss-covered gravestones, into the laughing, joyous sunlight, down past the straggling High-street to the very cliff's edge, where the sea was waveless and purple that bright autumn morning, and the fishing boats were dotting its grand expanse, waiting for the welcome breeze to start for the North Sea. To the left smiling cornfields waved in the deep golden sunlight, amid a very shower of scarlet poppies and mauve-coloured scabious.

A dainty little white rose fell from Kate Karson's bouquet; he stooped quickly and picked it up; but in his eagerness to become its owner it lay crushed in the hot firm grasp, and the petals, soft and velvety, clung to his fingers torn from their parent stem.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "I have broken it, after making a fool of myself to get it."

The wedding party had reached its destination, and stopped before a white-barred gate that was garlanded with roses and blossoms of every hue.

The little train wound its way up to the wide-open door of the farmhouse, where dogs and goats were gaily decked with white ribbons, and the clatter of glass and plates could be heard amid a very clamour of mirth as the bridal couple entered the house. The festive sounds jarred upon the lonely watcher, who seemed like a lost sheep out of the fold, and by no means pleased at his position.

"Willow Cottage," he muttered, as he sauntered back to his hotel. "I shall make a call there on some pretext or other before twenty-four hours pass over my head."

As if fate had specially selected him to shower its favours upon, his wish to meet the lovely owner of the white rose was brought about in the simplest of ways, as he was betaking himself to the Willows, pregnant with a thousand and one excuses for his intrusion.

Seated beneath the friendly shade of the idle water-mill was the girl whose face had haunted the memory of Mr. Richard Lonsdale all that long, weary night—the longest he had ever experienced; for a mad, overwhelming passion had taken possession of his senses for the first time in his cold, selfish life.

The oaks, crisp and brown, rustled over her golden head, uncovered, for her sun bonnet lay neglected at her side; and the red, ripe apples fell among the long grass, ever and anon, in the orchard at the left of her, and she laughed as they dropped off, and bade a huge old dog at her feet to go and fetch her some.

"Idle old fellow, you do nothing but blink and look stupid!" she said, caressingly; and, as if to protest against the soft impeachment, he rushed off into the rippling stream, and splashed and floundered about for her edification in a most frolicsome way for a staid old dog, while she laughed at his antics to his intense delight.

"Grim, you bad dog—come here!" she called later on, in a fever of fright, as she caught sight of him jumping up upon a strange gentleman, clad in irreproachable light clothes, bespattering him with mud and green slime.

"Do not be alarmed," he amblingly remarked, hat in hand, going up to her; "a little clear water will soon wash this off."

"Let me try to remedy the mischief," she said, in true distress at the rudeness of Grim, and its results.

"To have so fair a Samaritan to come to my aid is worth the loss of a dozen suits," he replied, gallantly; "and as for you, sir" (so the dog), "I hold myself your debtor for life."

And he fixed on her such an admiring, yearning look that hot blushes surged into her face for a brief instant, then fled, leaving it as pale as a snowdrop, as she dabbed him with her own white kerchief, with clear sparkling water; and the fearful thought rushed through her brain of the boldness of her behaviour to a perfect stranger, and the construction he might put upon it.

Grim rolled and frisked in the cool grass, and looked up at his mistress with a broad smile, as if a dog can be said to smile.

He patted his huge, rough head, and told him he was a knowing old rascal, and made himself insanely happy, basking in the sunny presence of the loveliest girl in Mill Hill.

"What a delicious scene this is!" he burst out, enraptured at the glowing picture. "I wish I were a painter; it should live for ever on canvas, as it will on my memory."

"I have made a sketch of it," she said, impulsively; "Grim is in it, too."

"But the chief one and loveliest is not," he added, quickly. "I mean yourself," taking her hand suddenly before she could prevent him, making those grey eyes dilate, then droop, abashed at his audacity.

"Nay, do not frown," he pleaded, humbly, as she withdrew it coldly from his restraining grasp. "There are some friendships that fasten upon one with a flash, as it were, while others take

an eternity to cement. Such is the feeling I have for you."

"It is very good of you to say so, sir," she rejoined, timidly; "but I should get into no end of trouble if my mother only guessed I talked so freely to a strange gentleman. We country-folk have rather primitive notions about propriety!"

"To the winds with such notions," he urged; "there must be a beginning to everything, small or great. Grim was the author of our friendship, and I mean to drink his very good health to-night at dinner. Now I must repair an omission I have made in not introducing myself before, Miss Karson."

"You know my name!" she said, in surprise.

"Well—er—yes!" he answered, awkwardly; "it was told me yesterday. The fact is, I saw you acting the part of bridesmaid, and asked your name. So, you see, I had seen you before, though you knew it not; and now, Miss Karson, behold in me Richard Lonsdale, at your service, staying at this delightful seaside place for change and rest after a heavy season in London."

"That must, indeed, be a nice place!" she said, animatedly. "I would give much to see some of its wonders."

"Its pleasures soon pall upon you when you live in it a few years;" and he thought what a still such original beauty as hers would make in the fashionable salons of the upper ten.

A lovely little foot peeped from beneath her skirt, tiny enough to have fitted Cinderella's famous glass slipper.

The ardour flashed out of his eyes at the ravishing sight; and sweet, winsome, timid Kate Karson became overwhelmed with confusion.

"Come, Grim, we must go home!" she called.

"So soon!" he said, humbly.

"Yes, sir! I have tarried too long already."

"You will come to-morrow!" he urged; "and bring your sketch to show me!"

"It is only a very crude one at present. It is not quite finished yet."

"All the better, for I can sit and watch you complete it."

What would she not have given to have answered no! But the glamour of his dark eyes and seductive manner was too much for the simple village maid, whose knowledge of men was confined to a very limited number, none of whom came up to his standard in her estimation. Such a handsome, yet graceful, fascinating man was a revelation she never dreamed existed out of a novel.

"Come, do not deny your new friend so small a boon!" he laughed. "Small to you, but infinite in its pleasure to me."

"If you really would very much like to see it," she stammered, half irresolutely, "I suppose I must say, yes!"

"I have triumphed!" he thought. "She will be my willing captive yet," as he lifted his hat with studious politeness, and bade her adieu.

"How fresh and winsome she is!" he murmured, as she wended her way down the lane to the Willows with a springy step that scarcely bruised the crisp copper and yellow-coloured leaves that strew her path. "I wonder if there is any rustic yokel in the background! At all events he will find himself out in the cold, exhausted, done for entirely."

How his insidious voice rang in her ears as she sped home! It was sweeter far than the notes of the most dulcet lute to her artless imagination.

"How hot you look, Kate, my child!" her mother observed, as she ran breathless into her presence. "What ails you?"

"The sun is high, mother, and I thought I should keep dinner waiting, so I hurried a bit."

"You should not have tarried so long," she chided. "I do not like to see you flushed, dear. It weakens you to exert yourself so after yesterday's jinketting; you are not strong;" and the widowed mother looked anxiously into the perturbed young face with a wealth of tender concern.

"Do not worry over me, dear mother!" she pleaded, as they adjourned to the chintz covered

little room they called a dining-room, where a simple, but appealing repast was awaiting them of young chickens, late peas, and a small ham.

"I hope you have brought home a good appetite!" Mrs. Karson pursued, as she took her accustomed place, and commenced to dissect the chickens.

But, alas! though Kate avowed she possessed a huge one, the dainty wing and piece of breast lay untouched on her plate, while she made a big show of voracity with her peas, pretending to scoop them up with her fork whenever her mother looked towards her.

Love, that terrible, devastating fire, had entered with its barbed arrows into her innocent heart, and all things mundane seemed worthless and tame.

"It's a fine dinner you've eaten, I must say," grumbled their one old faithful servant, as she cleared away the dinner-things; "and such chickens, too! Why, Farmer Appleby sent the finest ones I ever clapped my two eyes upon."

"Don't say anything, Betsy," she urged, humbly. "I am not very well; I suppose it is the excitement of the wedding yesterday."

With that explanation she was obliged to be content; and Kate, left to herself, gave herself up to delicious, though dangerous thoughts of a pair of dark, passionate eyes and an alluring tongue, soft and sweet as the notes of an Aeolian harp.

There is a depth in the human heart which, once stirred, is long, long ere its waters again subside; and this depth he had certainly stirred in her innocent yet romantic nature, despite the fact that she was already the heart and soul of a worthy young fellow who adored her but for whom she never felt a vestige even of this entrancing day-dream.

The next morning found her up with the lark, and positively overhauling her meagre wardrobe, in search of her most becoming morning gown, to dazzle the eyes of this stranger.

Sweet, dainty little moth, gliding thy pretty wings to bask in the false rays of the dazzling Light, to scorch them and die!

Awashy she sped to the old mill, looking back guiltily to see that Betsy was not watching her. Her heart beat tumultuously as she caught sight of his too well remembered form pacing the river's bank. With swift, short steps he turned and met her face to face.

"How good of you to keep your promises!" he said, ardently, a world of tenderness in his deep, unfathomable eyes that could glitter, snake-like, when he was crossed or thwarted in his plans.

"I fear I am doing very wrong," she stammered; "but you wanted to see the sketch of the old mill, and I cannot bear to break my word."

"You couldn't leave me to go back in a state of distraction, to fret and fume!" he said, smiling, "and to say one of the fairest of her sex was the cruellest."

She did not answer his badinage, but produced the sketch from a small portfolio, which he duly admired, and of course praised.

But the fair artist more than shared his admiration.

After a short, too blissfully spent half-hour she rose, and remarked, with just a tremula of trepidation,—

"This must be our last meeting. Good-bye, Mr. Lonsdale!"

"What!" he gasped, paling at the import of her words. "Never see you any more!"

"Yes," breathing in short, little gasps, "for it is wrong, deceitful, base."

"There is someone whom you owe allegiance to," he said, hoarsely. "That is the reason of your decision. Tell me; do not trifling with me. You would not if you knew what pain your words have inflicted."

"My mother, of course," she returned evasively, colouring to the roots of her hair.

"Only your mother!" he pursued, relentlessly. "Is there not someone else?" catching her hands and imprisoning them so tightly that she flinched as he tried to wrest her secret from her by fixing his eyes upon hers in a masterful, basilisk fashion that almost terrified her.

"Yes, my future husband. There!" she cried, brought to bay by a will stronger than hers.

"I thought so," he said, brokenly, "and you love him!"

"No, I do not;" she faltered, "I wish I did!"

"Then, my darling! my little fairy tempter, he shall never wrest you from me! You must be mine—mine alone," he replied, passionately.

"I dare not break his heart; my mother would curse me," she said, in distress.

"But you would not mind breaking mine he retorted.

"You never knew me till yesterday!" she protested, timidly; but averting her face from his too ardent gaze.

"What is time when two hearts are concerned? Love, my darling, knows no measurement or law, except its own, which is consecrated by nature!"

Oh! the bliss of listening to such words, passion-laden, fervent and deep as the unfathomable sea that gleamed at a distance, and as treacherous.

But, alas! her nature was too good, too pure to let it innocence to escape from the toils he knew so well how to spread; so his arts and wiles crushed out all misgivings of conscience, and she yielded to the alluring moment a too willing ear.

They lingered beneath the silent mill, each drinking in fresh draughts of love; then she sprang up in alarm as she heard the bell, summoning her back, as was the usual custom of Betsy when lunch or dinner was ready.

"Mine! I would challenge the whole world; no man will ever rob me of my little beauty!" he said, exultingly, a nasty light in his eyes.

On she flitted, like a young antelope, little reckoning the storm that was brewing, and ready to descend on her defenceless head.

"Oh! Miss Kate, you will catch it!" blurted out Betsy, as panting with running she entered the Cottage.

"Why!" she gasped, paling with fright. "Has mother heard about Mr. Lonsdale?"

Kate was no dissembler; she could not carry on deceit for any length of time.

"She's been and heard that you have been a-firing with some strange gent up by the mill, and she's fine and vexed, I can tell you!"

"I did not mean any harm," Kate said, humbly. "Betsy, do not you be hard upon me!"

"It's not for the likes of me to talk to you, Miss Kate; but I do think you might be a little circumspect, when you have such a devoted lover, who is soon to become your husband and all!"

"Is that you, Kate?" her mother called eagerly. "Come to me directly."

Burning with shame she obeyed, and presented herself before her, guilt and fear on her sweet face.

"What is this I hear?" Mrs. Karson commenced severely; "that you give stolen meetings to some unknown gentleman? Can it be true? Has my daughter forgotten what is due to herself and our good name to thus act the part of a flirt, a false-hearted jilt?"

"Oh, mother! I know I have been very foolish; but I did not think it would anger you so much!"

"Then it is true!" her mother rejoined sternly. "Thank Heaven, your dear father is not alive to witness the deceit of his only child!"

"He is a gentleman, mother, and would not injure a hair of my head," she answered, tearfully.

"You are the affianced wife of George Osborne, a man of honour, whose whole happiness is concentrated in you! This man, whom you have thought fit to meet by stealth, may be a gentleman in appearance, but cannot be one in nature, or he would never influence a girl to deceive her mother. Such a man must be bad to the core."

"I am only to blame," she faltered, loyally, trying to screen her partner in disgrace. "It was not possible for him to know the sorrow it

would cause you. Pardon me this once; I will try never to offend again."

"If I thought you would act so basely I feel I could shut you out of my heart. I detest deceit or falsehood in my own sex!" she said, coldly; "it is abhorrent to my nature. Go to your own room, and in silence reflect upon your unnatural conduct, and petition pardon from one you have so deeply offended."

Mrs. Karson was very much incensed at her daughter's conduct. It seemed to revolt her whole nature, for she had reposed the utmost confidence and trust in her truth and innocence. This was a revelation that hardened her heart against her poor, innocent child and almost made her cruel.

The old mill had but one visitor the next day and the day after that; and Mr. Lonsdale became completely crazed at Kate's absence, while she moved about the house unable to settle her mind to anything, her thoughts always reverting to the mill and its solitary watcher, whom she knew, by instinct, was waiting in vain for her presence.

Mrs. Karson never relaxed her vigilance, notwithstanding her daughter's solemn promise not to meet Lonsdale again; and so the poor girl remained in secret at the thought of her cruel conduct, as it would appear to him.

"I have nipped that clandestine affair in the bud," Mrs. Karson thought with satisfaction, little dreaming the pain and misery her daughter was suffering, or the wisdom of tempering mercy with justice, or that harshness sometimes defeats its own ends.

Driven to desperation Lonsdale presented himself at the Cottage with the intention of offering himself as a suitor to Kate; the wild craving for a sight of her would not be repelled.

Kate saw him approach the house from her little room, and her heart's pulsation seemed as if it would stop, while her eyes gleamed with a feverish fire of apprehension when the sitting-room door closed upon him.

What took place she never knew, but after about a quarter of an hour she saw him stride down the gravel path, swing open the gate viciously, and depart without even raising his head, then she burst into a flood of tears which she had to brush away as Mrs. Karson entered the room.

"I suppose you know that man has dared to force himself into my house?" she said, indignantly; "he, an utter stranger, too, as if we were so low and degraded in the social scale that he conferred an honour on us by his notice. That was his thought, for every sentence he spoke revealed it."

"He could not think anything so mean," pleaded Kate, timidly.

"How dare he presume to call upon me without an introduction, if it was not meant as an insult?" Mrs. Karson demanded, wrathfully. "I have come to tell you to banish all thoughts of this man from your mind now and for ever; he is as treacherous and wily as a serpent. I can read him like a book. Never let me hear the sound of his name, lest I forget you are my child, and cast you from my heart for ever."

"I will obey you, mother!" she said, brokenly.

And Mrs. Karson, in a moment of regret at her harshness to her only child, kissed the drawn, pale little mouth with her wonted affection, and congratulated herself upon the great tact she had displayed in driving away this romance from the too susceptible Kate.

CHAPTER II.

"THAT she dragon shall not befall me!" Lonsdale muttered fiercely, as he banged the wicket with a loud crash. "I'll have her, in spite of a thousand mothers. She little calculates on the nature of the man she has to deal with."

That night, when dusk closed over land and sea he made his way stealthily to Willow Cottage. What plan he intended to pursue he had not even arranged. He only knew he was determined to see her at any cost, and bear her off in spite of

all law, human and divine. The obstacles only added fresh fuel to the fire that he felt consuming him.

He hovered around the small domain till all the lights were out but one. Something told him it was Kate's and a mad thought seized him to climb the old espalier that ran up to the window, the blind of which was not quite down.

In a trice he was scaling the branches and clinging to the window sill.

He found a good foothole, and peered into the room, and his breath came in gasps at the sight which met his view.

Kate was seated before a table, her chin resting in one hand, her other hand hung by her side listlessly. She seemed lost in some sad reverie; her hair fell in a rich shower over her shoulders to below her waist. By her side was her bed shrouded in vapoury muslin, tied back with rose-coloured ribbons. He took in every detail, ravished at its sweetness and purity.

He saw her nether lip quiver; heard her sigh, as tears coursed each other down her pale cheeks.

"She is thinking of me!" he thought triumphantly.

Suddenly she rose, and commenced to coil up her hair for the night. Then she paused, and a little cry of alarm escaped her as she heard a tap at her window.

"There it is again. Good Heavens! what can it be?" she exclaimed half aloud, her eyes dilating with fear.

"I hope she won't alarm the house!" he muttered in affright; "it would spoil all my plans."

Trembling with terror, she went towards the open window to listen again.

"It is I, Richard Lonsdale," he said, in a half whisper. "Come, speak to me a moment. I am distracted at not meeting you!"

"You—you here!" she faltered, aghast at his boldness, and shrinking back with maiden fears, though his voice thrilled her to the heart's core with sweet emotion.

"Forgive me, Kate, my love, for intruding upon you at this unseemly time! But love is my only excuse; love that is fast consuming me. Oh, my darling! I have some pity on me. Do you know your mother drove me from the house with bitter insults when I came to ask your hand of her? Have you, too, resolved to discard me; to drive me to desperation!"

"What am I to do?" she pleaded, weeping. "I could not disobey my mother!"

"Come downstairs, and meet me out in the garden," he urged tenderly.

"I cannot deny him!" she cried, torn with conflicting emotion between the man she loved too well, and her promise to her mother.

The lover won, for he saw the light recede; and Kate in a few moments stepped out and was caught in his arms.

The moon fell in a bright flood upon the pair, and tipped the shrubs with liquid silver. A divine peace reigned over earth and sky, but peace did not dwell in their hearts, for they were throbbing with yearning, passionate pain, as he held her to him in one loving, burning embrace.

"In pity let me go!" she wailed.

"Never!" he answered, firmly. "You are mine by the hallowed name of love; no other man shall ever breathe the sacred name wife to you but me."

"What would you do?" she asked, dazed with the entralling position she found herself in.

"Take me away from here to-night; now, this instant!"

"I dare not. Oh, no!" and she gave a little shudder at the enormity of the thought.

He clasped her again to his breast. He threaded her silken hair through his slender fingers till all caution and reason was stifled, and she whispered, hoarsely, as her head fell on his shoulder,—

"Do as you will. I am thine!" she sighed, lost in her dream of bliss.

"False, degraded girl; and it is thus you have kept your promise to me!" said an awful voice, as Mrs. Karson stood before them, her face dis-

torted with anger. "You, sir, deserve to be whipped for your cruel treachery."

"I own my presence at this hour is against me, madam; but love such as ours, defies bars or bolts," he retaliated, still holding Kate in his arms, as if to shield her from her mother's wrath, which only added to her fury.

"Release my daughter, this moment, sir; coward that you are."

"Spare him. Oh! mother, I love him," Kate cried, piteously.

"Vile, despicable girl, go, and never dare to call me mother again lest I curse you," she retorted, mad with rage at Kate's disobedience.

"Do not, I implore, cast me from your heart, mother," she pouted, in bitter anguish.

But Mrs. Karson waited to hear no more. With a set, determined face, rigid as death itself, she went back into the house.

"Oh, Richard! I shall die of shame," she murmured, distractedly, wringing her hands, in mortal agony. "My mother will never forgive me."

"Am I nothing to you?" he argued, gently, holding her in his arms, and pressing kisses soft and loving on her pale lips and brow. "She will pardon all when you are my wife."

"Do you really believe it?" she asked, a little hopefully, the term wife sounding in her ears so entrancing in its bewildering mystery, and a tiny spark of hope fluttering to her heart.

"I would stake all I possess, my darling, that your mother will receive you with open arms when her temper has had time to cool down."

Such sophistry was too subtle for her guileless nature to contend with; and she permitted him to lead her away from her childhood's innocent, happy home, to mingle with the world, where thorns, instead of roses, would strew her path.

CHAPTER III.

"RICHARD, do be merciful. Consider how humiliating it is for me to be hidden away from all my girlhood's happy past; do indulge me. You know how intensely anxious I am getting; even my rest is broken by miserable dreams, and dear mother's face is for ever haunting me. What if she were to die with grief. Such things have happened!" pleaded Kate, a few months after the memorable night she had left home to be secretly married to Richard Lonsdale.

"Little tease, why cannot you wait?" he returned, chidingly. "You know how prejudiced your mother is against me. Let time gloss over our offence; she will become more resigned as time goes on."

"You always put me off with the same excuse, 'Wait a little longer.' How can mother be angry with you? I am your wife, dearest; surely that will atone for my disobedience in running away?"

She was seated on a couch, picking nervously at a tea rose he had given her that morning, claiming as his guerdon a kiss.

No wonder his eyes lingered on the beautiful pleader with a world of passion, for she looked the personification of beauty. Her little arched foot was tapping beneath the mass of creamy lace that formed her petticoat, over which was a silk morning robe, lined with pale blue, which clung round her form in classic folds, lending her the grace of a Psyche. Rubies and brilliants flashed on her tapering rosy fingers, one magnificent star gleaming in her braids of silky hair.

The silence was at last broken by her saying, "Why don't you speak, Richard? You say you love me; and my slightest wish, where filial love is concerned, ought to obtain instant consent. An ungrateful daughter never can become a good wife."

"All nonsense, Kate. What! reproaches already, when I plead only for love and kisses. It is not kind of you, my darling. Wait only just a wee bit longer."

To her innocent mind he was a demi-god; one of the noblest of the noble, who, finding her a wayside blossom, had raised her to exalted position.

"My darling husband, how can I refuse you anything?" she said, tenderly.

"Sweet little fairy tempter, that is better," he said, gratified at her obedience. "Tell me, wifey, could you go back into that cold pulseless world where I found you?"

"As your wife that would be impossible," she returned, with a frank smile.

"But supposing you had a choice?" he persisted, "one that led you by different paths—a mother here, but a husband nearer and dearer. What would you do?"

"Cleave to both, dearest," she said, with artless innocence, for her heart was large enough to give fealty to each.

"My darling, you have entered my world now, and I am very jealous of anyone coming between us, even a mother."

"You wouldn't be angry," she urged, winding her white arms around his neck, "if I wrote just a wee few lines to mother? Now, don't look cross or refuse me, and I will make myself so nice that you will fall in love with me over again."

"That would not be a very difficult task," he laughed. "Why, I am doing that every hour of the day."

"Then I may write?" she purred, coaxingly. "No, not yet," he said, frowning at her persistency, and leaving her to go to his club.

Tears fell quickly from her pretty eyes at the stern refusal, for no reasoning could convince her that it would be wrong to write to one who had been both mother and father to her for years, and had watched over her with tender care from her earliest days.

Although pale-blue brocaded curtains of rich silk swayed in the breeze, and every chair, divan, and couch was a downy nest, on which Parian marble statuettes looked down, yet these evidences of refined wealth brought no joy to her sad heart; and she regretted the step she had taken, and yearned over the simple delights which Willow Cottage had contained for her.

Left very much to herself, Kate sometimes wandered out alone, and felt solitary amidst the teeming population of London, everyone she met being to her perfect strangers. She longed for a greeting, a smile from some one other than her husband, to show that she was not quite shut out from sympathy and friendship.

It one of her rambles she was recognised by George Osborne, the man she had cast aside in favour of Richard Lonsdale.

How his honest heart throbbed when he saw her! It recalled old memories of a bygone time when she was all the world to him, and they had wandered through copse and thicket gathering wild flowers, and speaking softly of the day when they should be man and wife.

Nobler far than most men, although he was only a yeoman, he harboured no resentment against Kate. He only sorrowed in secret at her loss, and was willing to, even now, make great sacrifice for her sweet sake should the occasion arise to make the demand upon him.

With no sinister purpose he followed her home, drinking in every line and curve of her beauty; calling up her smiles and winning ways when they were boy and girl together.

"It looks mean of me," he muttered, "to play the spy upon her, but her poor mother is going fast, dying of a broken heart because she thinks that fellow has played her false. It would lift a weight from my mind to hear from her lips that this suspicion is unfounded. Can this be love, to discard old faces for new—to pitilessly shut out even her mother? Oh, no! it cannot be! There is some glamour over the poor child, something from which she will awaken some day in bitter tears and repentance!"

Unconscious of his near presence she walked on, deep in thought on the absorbing topic—her mother, whose face haunted her like an accusing conscience, and would intrude itself in spite of her every effort to shake off the nightmare.

After Kate had gone in, Osborne knocked, and asked the maid whether Mrs. Lonsdale was in, adding,—

"I know she would be pleased to see me! Say it is an old friend of her mother's!"

"Show him in!" cried Kate, excitedly, not

thinking of whom it might be, or the pang it would inflict to meet her former lover face to face.

The words "an old friend of her mother's" took her heart by storm. Someone was at hand to give her tidings, to ease her mind of dark forebodings, and she was content.

But when George Osborne entered she shrank back in utter dismay, and gave a little cry of alarm, for she did not wish to see him of all men, because a guilty conscience made her a coward.

"Kate, don't be afraid, lass," he said, choking down his emotion. "I come as a friend, a well-wisher, and not to upbraid you for the past. Every woman has a right to make her own choice. I only hope yours has and will prove a happy one!"

And before she was aware of it he had imprisoned her little hand in both of his, and was looking down with a wealth of tenderness into her face, into those tear-laden eyes which had once been so sunny, so sparkling.

"It is kind of you, George!" she murmured. "How is mother?"

"Well, lass, she is getting old, you know, and—"

He wrung her hand, for he was afraid to tell her the news—of that approaching time when tears and bitter repentance would be of no avail to call her back from the dead.

"Tell me. Oh! in mercy's sake be quick! Is she well? Did she send you?"

"No; I met you quite by chance. Your mother is ill; in fact, dying!"

"Oh, no! not dying, George!" she gasped. "Do not say that my disobedience has killed her?"

"She was too harsh, lass, in driving you from home, and I told her so; but, you see, she was always high-spirited and impulsive, and did it all on the spur of the moment. She was sorry for it afterwards, when too late, and now she yearns day and night to see you. Why didn't you write, Kate?"

"Because—because he would not let me!" she faltered, casting down her eyes in very contrition.

"Then," this vengefully—"there is deceit. Tell me truly, Kate, are you that man's wedded wife?"

"What do you mean? Why do you ask the question? Surely mother does not think what you do?" she cried, burning blusher leaping into her face and dying it a deep crimson.

"Kate, the world, even those that love you best, want to be convinced, and won't take things on trust. It pains me to speak so plainly; but as you value your soul I ask you for the truth; even at the worst you have been more sinned against than sinning."

Drawing herself up proudly, and looking him straight in the eyes, she said, with a dignity that awed him,—

"Yes, I am Richard Lonsdale's wife; and, as such, can look the whole world in the face!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" he said, cheerfully; "but why cannot you run down and see your mother? Surely you are not ashamed of her, Kate! You will not permit even a husband to make you forget her! She is dying, I tell you, of suspense. A word from you, the sight of your marriage lines, would bring her back to life. Be brave, Kate; there is only one mother in the world for any of us, and she was the best of mothers to you. Come with me; do not hesitate; there is no crime in going to a mother's arms. Even the law dare not blame you for that!"

"I will go, but not with you. He would be furious if he knew you had come here, much less that I had gone to Mill Hill in your company. Do not lose a moment, George. Tell mother that I am a wife, that I am coming to beg her forgiveness on my knees, to make her happy once more, to be to her a loving daughter, all that I have ever been in the happy past over and over again."

"You mean this, Kate?"

"Yes, on my soul; no husband shall, or dare keep me from my dying mother's side! I have been too yielding, too obedient, but will be

so no longer," she cried, with flashing eyes, and resolute face.

"There's my brave Kate of old! Don't fret, lass, I will always be your friend. Send for me night or day, in hall, rain or sunshine, and George Osborne will battle with death itself to reach your side! You will not be long after me, Kate! Think of what it would be to you if you were too late!"

"No, I will start almost at once."

"But what if he should say no?" he asked, looking at her keenly.

"Where duty is concerned I will not ask permission, but go!"

He wrung her hand, and went on his way rejoicing, because she had proved herself not the heartless girl he had thought her.

When alone, Kate dressed herself in the plainest garb she could select, and after writing a few lines as follows: "I am going down to see my dying mother. You can come, too, if you wish," she left the Chestnuts, little caring what he would think of her conduct in thus braving his anger.

"Gone to Mill Hill," he exclaimed, fury flaming into his dusky eyes, as he crushed the note and flung it away viciously. "So, my rebel Kate, you have chosen your mother before me, and defied me! The day will come when you will rue this bitterly."

Nor was his anger appeased when, on questioning the servant, he ascertained that a gentleman had called upon Kate in his absence.

Meanwhile the erring daughter had reached the railway station nearest her home, and the aspect of the district she had to pass to reach Willow Cottage was but ill calculated to raise her spirits on a wet, stormy evening.

In the distance rose rough granite summits covered by enormous blocks piled over each other—a very wilderness of masses.—

"Confusedly hurried,
The fragments of a former world."

Over these mountain summits the descending evening mist, cold and grey, had replaced the rays of the red sun, as Kate hastened on, experiencing a kind of sad relief on seeing the light that shone in the window of the little room—her mother's.

Pausing at the threshold, she threw aside her drenched cloak and hat, and strove to smooth her wetted hair, ere she stealthily opened the door.

"How is dear mother, Betsy?" she whispered, on seeing that faithful old soul, who had been watching for her coming.

"She sleeps still; but in her sleep she has been muttering about you. You must have some tea, or something warm; you are so drenched!"

"No, no! I want nothing only to see mother, to ask her forgiveness!"

Stealing upstairs she sat at the bedside and saw the wreck which she had become.

All was very still in that sick-room. In the hall a great old-fashioned Dutch clock ticked-tacked slowly and monotonously.

Shading the light with her hands, Kate stole a glance at her mother's face; and an alteration in its expression filled her with such terror that a cry almost escaped her.

The mouth was distorted, and the eyes seemed to regard her with a weird expression.

The left arm was outside the coverlet, and her hand rested on the edge of the bed.

With eyes laden with tears, Kate knelt reverently down to kiss it, taking the hand between her own carefully.

How heavy that hand felt now—cold, too! Its touch startled her.

Death was too surely there, but Kate had never looked upon it, and only felt wildly startled and terrified.

"Oh, mother! dear mother! come back to me!" she exclaimed, in a voice whose tones seemed discordant and shrill to her own ear. "Say you forgive me. Oh, merciful Heaven! I am too late—soo late!"

Bewildered and awestruck, with a wild beating in her heart and in her brain, Kate drew back; she stood still and listened.

There was no sound save the pulsation in her own breast, and the ticking of the old wooden clock, which now seemed to have become unnaturally loud.

Betsy entered at this moment, and said, sorrowfully,—

"She has gone to her rest, and you, child, have no mother. Now Heaven grant that the man you left her for may prove to you as true a protector and friend!"

CHAPTER IV.

POOR Kate, when calmness took the place of grief, sat down, and penned a long, loving letter to her husband, pleading for his sympathy in her dire distress.

Days passed, but no answer reached the unhappy young wife, whose whole attention had to be devoted to arranging the details of the funeral and other important matters.

"How strange it is," she moaned, "that Richard keeps this terrible, cruel silence now that I am alone and in sorrow. My poor mother cannot chide him now, and her death has freed him from an obstacle to our perfect happiness."

"Is your husband coming today, Miss Kate?" asked Betsy, adhering to the old familiar name instead of the formal one of Mrs. Lonsdale.

"I cannot say," she sighed wearily; "he has not answered my letter or telegram. It is unaccountable—inexplainable."

"I expect we are not grand enough for his lordship!" muttered Betsy, irritably. "A man who despises his wife's mother won't prove much of a husband, I reckon. Time will show, Miss Kate, that I am right."

"But you were always prejudiced against him, Betsy," Kate protested, loyally.

"It will come to him some day," retorted Betsy; "not that it will make any difference whether he stays away or not. Your poor mother won't rest less peacefully. She didn't like him to be near her in life, that much I can tell you."

"It is very unkind of you, dear Betsy, to call up the unhappy past," Kate observed, tearfully.

"There, there, dear child, don't take on so. I won't say another word."

How drearily the time passed at Willow Cottage for poor Kate, whose heart was doubly stricken by the loss of her mother, and the harsh, if not absolutely cruel conduct of her husband.

But a far greater sorrow was in store for her, as if Heaven was frowning at her sin of disobedience; for when, after the funeral, she returned to "The Chestnuts," she found the house shut up, and no one could give her even the slightest clue to her husband's whereabouts.

He had vanished completely out of her life, without one word of explanation or farewell.

"Oh, cruel, cruel fate!" she moaned, as with a heart full of despair she went back to her old home; "what have I done to deserve this punishment at his hands! But he will surely relent, and come to me at the Cottage, which, he once said, was the dearest spot on earth for him."

As day succeeded day hope died out of her heart altogether, and then the awful thought occurred to her that her husband had deserted her for ever—at a time, too, when she doubly needed his loving protection and sympathy.

George Osborne called daily, in spite of her refusal each time to see him. Her loneliness appealed to his kind nature, and he took the customary rebuff with patience, resolving inwardly to find out why his lost love inhabited her old home alone.

At last the longed-for moment came, and he made the most of it by following Kate into the churchyard one afternoon where she was going with a basket of her mother's favourite flowers to place on her grave.

An expression of reproach stole into her face when he stood beside her that made him flinch, despite his resolution.

"George!" she faltered, "am I not unhappy enough without your persecuting me even here?"

Your visit to me in London has wrought enough mischief already."

"Heaven forgive you!" he said, with bitter pain in his voice.

"I know I am cruel," she cried in dismay, "but, oh, George! I am distracted, and my husband was so terribly jealous, that I can only believe he has discarded me because of your visit that fatal day."

"Then he has acted the dastard, and left you?" he said, clutching his hands vengefully. "The hound! How I wish I had him here! I would teach him a lesson he would never forget as long as life lasts in his false heart."

"I will not listen to such words here, over my mother's grave. Remember I am his unhappy wife, and shall soon become the mother of his child."

How bitterly the words "his child" grated on his ears, and stabbed his wounded heart afresh.

Had he been so minded he might have given vent to the anger he so justly felt, because of the cruel, heartless way in which he had been cast off by her.

But love still reigned in his heart for this wilful girl, whose very faults assumed the garb of virtues in his eyes, which still delighted to look at her fair, if deceitful, face, which was even more lovely now than ever, sorrow having spiritualised it.

"And you are going to submit tamely to this brutal treatment at his hands?" he asked brokenly; "you are his wife, and can claim a wife's rights."

"No! if he does not love me for myself alone I shall not supplicate him, because the law gives me certain rights. Rather than do that I would discard him from my heart, crush all affection for him out of it, and live only for—"

Here she paused, as if unwilling to give utterance to the word that sprang to her white lips.

Her face paled to the snowy whiteness of the lily, and her dove-like eyes now flashed with latent hate and resentment, transforming her from a gentle, yielding girl into a woman with a will to do and to dare.

Even George Osborne quailed before the fire that shot from out her grey eyes, but it stirred his heart with mad exultation to see that she was ready to avenge her wrongs herself.

It was a pitiable picture this—thinking and talking of vengeance in the city of the dead, over the name of one whom both had loved in her lifetime.

There was no softness in his heart for the man who had taken from him his one true love, and instead of nourishing it in his bosom, had cast it aside with contempt to wither, perchance to die.

And he, George Osborne, could do nothing but stand aside and see this cruel wrong committed; he had not the consolation of even a brother's right to defend her.

"Kate!" he said, hoarsely, "I shall never intrude upon you except as a devoted friend. A barrier has risen between us which nothing but death can level, but I rejoice to see that you will not submit tamely to be trampled on. It was the thought of your slavish obedience to him that drove me mad; you, so lovingly nourished and cherished by her who slept beneath us, to be driven from your lawful home, exposed to the bitter jibes and sneers of a heartless world. When Richard Lonsdale and I meet he shall know that you are not so defenceless as he thinks."

"George, you mustn't do anything rash. Let me fight this battle out myself. If I find that I have undertaken a task too great for me to accomplish I will ask you to give me your aid. Are you content?"

"Yes, because I must be. He may be thousands of miles away; the name he has given you may be false, as he himself is. There must be war between you, Kate, for you are battling for your own honour, and the fair fame of a name which everyone in this village respects."

"Trust me, George. He found me yielding, obedient, docile, but now he shall know when we meet that I am a woman, not a simple child."

Good-bye! dear friend, and if you value my piece of mind, go away at once from Mill Hill."

He took her proffered hand, and, gulping down a choking sob, said, as he raised it tenderly, reverently to his lips,—

"Good-bye! Kate! You shall not see me again until you bid me come."

How lonely she felt standing there now that he had said a last good-bye; and bitter tears of vain repentance chased each other down her cheeks and fell upon the grass that was fast closing over her mother's resting-place.

Alas! she had a brief time to nurse her grief, for troubles came upon her fast and relentlessly.

Her mother's small pension died with her, and after defraying the doctor's bill and funeral expenses she was left almost if not quite penniless.

"What is to be done, child?" Betsy asked, sadly. "We can't live here without ways and means; besides, there will be another heavy expense presently."

"Heaven only knows what will become of me, Betsy. I wish I was lying beside mother in the churchyard."

"You mustn't take on so, Miss Kate. I have a little money put by for a rainy day; it is yours to do as you like with."

"No, no, Betsy; not for worlds would I touch a farthing of your hard-earned savings. I can work for a living, and will. He shall find that the daughter of Captain Carson is not a coward."

"Bravely spoken, child, and like your own dear mother. I shall never forget how she fought against poverty when your father's money was lost in that dastard gold-mine affair; and I will stand by you, lass, as I did by her, for only a few hours before she died she said to me, as if Heaven had given her some knowledge of what was going to happen, 'Betsy, look after Kate; take my place to her, watch over her, guard her, and Heaven will bless you for your kindness to an orphan.'

Kate threw her arms around the faithful creature's neck, and kissed her with many a murmured thanks; for while Betsy remained near her she would not be quite alone in the world.

If anything were needed to show her what her husband's determination was, it came in an unexpected way one morning as she sat in the little parlour crying her eyes out. Tears were her constant companions now, and took the place of smiles.

Her clothes and jewels arrived, but not one single word accompanied them, and to stab her more keenly the directions were in his well-known handwriting.

"Richard Lonsdale," she almost hissed, her anger was so kindled against him, "you have dared to put a wanton insult upon me, your wife, because you think me poor and defenceless, but I will live to repay you with interest. I take Heaven to witness that I will yet humble your proud, cruel heart in the dust."

One dark, stormy night, when the wind roared and moaned like some unquiet spirit, a tiny blossom was put into her arms by Betsy, and a flood of scalding tears fell on the infant's face as the galling thought obtruded itself of her loneliness on this the greatest triumph of womanhood, when that great mystic tie of motherhood crowned her golden head.

"My poor little wif!" she cried, in bitter anguish; "you have only me to love and cherish you; no fond, proud father will ever hold you in his arms. Heaven alone is your father now."

The child thrived under the solicitous care of Betsy, who really seemed to worship it, and Kate passed through her trying ordeal bravely, loyally.

But despite Kate's refusal to touch a penny of her devoted servant's little store, Betsy took it out of the bank, and kept matters straight in the little domestic circle.

But, alas! money has wings, however economically managed, and the winter, piercing and bitter in its intensity, found them in very sore straits, with funds getting seriously low.

"What shall we do?" faltered Kate, as,

seated before a meagre fire, she was nursing her baby boy. "Oh, Betsy! it is breaking my heart. I would not care for myself, but there is my child and you."

"Why not sell these jewels your flinty-hearted husband sent back?"

"You forget they were bought by him," she said, scornfully; "and I detest, loathe even to look upon them."

"Then why keep them, if they remind you of treachery and villainy? Let me take them to the next county town, and sell them for what they will fetch! I'd warrant they'll fetch a tidy sum."

"Do as you will," Kate said, dismally; "only do not bring them near me, or the wretched money either."

A sharp knock at the door made them both start, for in their abstraction they had not noticed the postman enter the garden.

"Sakes alive, what a row Tom makes!" Betsy grumbled; "it's enough to rouse the Seven Sleepers."

A swift, joyous thought rushed into Kate's mind that it might be a letter from Richard, who, in remorse, had at last relented.

"Give it to me, quick!" she said, eagerly, holding out a trembling hand.

"It isn't anything you fancy, child," Betsy rejoined, hopelessly; "it is addressed to your poor mother."

The light faded from Kate's eyes at this cruel disappointment; and it was with listless fingers that she broke the large yellow seal of an official envelope.

A little cry of amazement escaped her when she had mastered the contents.

"Why this is like some marvellous dream!" she cried, joyously. "Only fancy, Betsy, the gold-mine shares in which poor father invested five thousand pounds are each worth a thousand pounds; and I am now heiress to fifty thousand."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Betsy, fervently. "My beautiful boy will be a gentleman, after all, and you a lady; rich and guarded by gold from the wretched poverty that cruel man thrust you into."

Sorrow was turned into joy, and Kate now looked the future resolutely in the face, for she had the means of tracking down her recreant husband, and crushing him with her scorn.

CHAPTER V.

In a charming house in South Kensington Kate located her little household; resolved not to bury her life in seclusion, but to mix with the gay world of fashion on the chance of meeting Richard Lonsdale.

Every detail in her new abode bespoke a refined taste. The drawing-room was a marvel of chasteness in its white and gold panels, and richly fretted ceiling. Costly rugs of every clime dotted the pine-polished floor. Rose-coloured silk draped the elegant gilt furniture, and fell in rich billows from the windows.

Secluded as she sometimes tried to be, society, that was on the qui vive ever since her advent in the neighbourhood, percolated in drawing her into its vortex.

So rich and beautiful a young widow, as she gave herself out to be, could not be allowed to waste her beauty and wealth on the desert air of solitude.

What she hungered, nay, prayed for, was not the admiration of these social butterflies, but to meet her husband face to face in the circles of the upper ten.

Suitors out of number sighed for a smile from their goddess, but she was always as cold as marble to their blandishments and wiles, carrying her secret bravely that she was a wife, and yet no wife.

Kate Little knew what fate had in store for her, and how she and the man she was fast learning to despise were destined to meet.

An accident happened at her very door. A gentleman was thrown from his horse and fell heavily on to the kerb, where he lay motionless,

apparently dead. Kate witnessed all this in a dreadful state of mind, for she had a feeling heart, and did not like to see anyone suffer.

Some people might have shrunk from being mixed up with such a terrible affair as this, and have left the police to superintend his removal to a hospital. But not so with Kate. Impelled by some unseen power, some uncontrollable impulse, she gave orders to have the sufferer brought into the house, and sent for a medical man forthwith.

For a time she could not bring herself to go near him; but Betsy, being of sterner material, was soon buying herself in trying to restore him to consciousness.

"Bless me!" she thought, on seeing his pale face, down which the blood trickled, "why it's Kate's husband, Richard Lonsdale! Dead, too, for all I know. Must I tell her? Perhaps the shock might kill her, poor child!"

Betsey solved the dilemma for herself by entering the room, and when her eyes fell upon his inanimate form and still, calm face, she uttered one cry, and fell senseless to the floor, thus guarding her secret from those who were helping Betsy to do what was possible for the sufferer until the arrival of the doctor.

The doctor said, gravely,—

"He must not be moved from this room. His life hangs upon a single thread; if his friends are known they had better be communicated with."

Betsey's lips quivered, and she stammered out that he was a perfect stranger; but that, later on, his name and position might be obtained. She was not going to let the world know her dear mistress's secret until she had first obtained her leave.

Feeling in his pockets, the doctor found a card case, and read out,—

"Earl of Crondace!" while Betsy stood by with uplifted hands, and eyes staring wide with astonishment—a bit of bye-play unobserved by others present.

As the address was on the card, "Crondace House, Park-lane," the doctor despatched a messenger post-haste with a few lines scribbled in pencil on the back of the Earl's card.

"Can I see your master or mistress?" he asked, turning to Betsy.

For a moment it was on the tip of her tongue to say, now that she knew his rank, "He lies there," but she checked the impulse, and said, instead,—

"My mistress is indisposed; she saw the accident, and it upset her nerves."

"In that case had I not better see her?" he suggested.

"Not yet, sir; quiet restores her better than anything; but any instructions you like to give I will see carried out."

"Then I presume I could trust you with this case as nurse till someone qualified can be sent for?"

"Certainly, sir. I have nursed my mistress through every ailment since she was a child."

As soon as she could quit the room over which death's angel brooded, she hastened to Kate, who had recovered consciousness, and said the moment she entered,—

"Speak, is he dead?"

"No, not dead, but very, very bad. The doctor has found out who he is."

"And who is he, pray?" she gasped, "if he is not Richard Lonsdale, my husband?"

"I thought it was him at first, till I heard his name and title. Why, child, he is an earl, and lives in Park-lane, wherever that may be," said Betsy, while Kate listened with breathless astonishment.

"An earl. Then he cannot be my husband. It must only be a close resemblance—that is all. I am thankful for it."

But an overwhelming desire possessed her to see that face once more, for if it was her husband she would be a countess, and her boy heir to a splendid inheritance.

With mingled feelings of emotion and curiosity she stood by the patient, looking intently upon the upturned face, which was that of Richard Lonsdale.

But to be convinced, and to put all doubts at rest, she touched the spring of a locket that hung from his chain, and there saw her own

miniature—one that she had given him when they were lovers.

How the thoughts chased each other in quick succession through her bewildered mind! If he died could she lay claim to her rights and those of her son? Her marriage certificate he had taken possession of, nor did she know the exact name of the town in Scotland where the marriage took place. The whole thing had passed before her as a dream, leaving her memory of events at that time in a hazy condition.

Then came the one all-torturing thought, that perhaps after all the marriage was not legal!

How she prayed for his recovery, that Heaven in its mercy would raise him up again to do her justice, to explain this mystery, and to restore her fair name and fame.

But weary weeks elapsed ere the patient was pronounced out of danger—weeks of mental agony and torture to Kate, whose love for him had returned with more than its old force, for not only was he her husband, but the father of her child.

She freely forgave him all his cruelty and desertion, putting it down to mad jealousy of Osborne.

She could not forget those pleasant hours at Mill Hill, those stolen interviews—so sweet because stolen—his endearing words, his kisses and caresses!

Until she had disobeyed him he had been kindness itself, and had lavished wealth upon her, denying her nothing that woman's vanity craved for.

Now that he had receded from the awful brink of that dark river, and was hourly making his way back through the golden portals of life, she was not sorry that the accident had occurred.

When he knew that her home had sheltered him in his dire extremity, her hands cooled his fevered brow—her eyes, never tired, watched the battle day and night 'twixt life and death, surely he would be to her all that he had been of old—her husband, lover, protector, friend!

And would he not be proud of his boy, who was growing up like him? And then the surprise of knowing that she was no longer poor but wealthy—perhaps as wealthy as himself!

All these floated like balmy dreams through her mind, and filled her with an ecstasy of hope that they would be reunited, never to be again parted.

How she longed for the hour to arrive when all these expectations would be fulfilled! Even Betsy, who had first doubted his loyalty, now rejoiced with her at her coming happiness.

As he approached consciousness, Kate kept away from the sick room. Why, she could not tell, except that, being weak, the knowledge of her presence might fill him with bitter reproaches against himself, and thus retard his recovery!

She was seated in her favourite room, thinking of him, when a handsomely-appointed carriage drove up to the house.

"Who can it be?" she said to herself, as she caught sight of an elegant woman shrouded in costly furs, from which her handsome face borrowed a soft delicacy.

"Lady Ransome, ma'am!" said the maid, entering with a card.

"Lady Ransome!" repeated Kate, in perplexity. "I never met her, surely." This sotto voce. "But go! Show the lady into the drawing-room!"

With a woman's pardonable pride to appear at her best she patted down the incorrigible stray ripples of hair that would not be smoothed into regularity, and entered the drawing-room.

"Mrs. Lonsdale, I presume!" remarked the visitor in rather a tone of hauteur, mixed with a repellent glance, as if Kate's beauty inspired her with distrust.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Lonsdale!" she repeated, with quiet dignity; "but I fail to remember having the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"No, we are not known to each other as yet," the lady said, briefly.

"Then to what circumstance do I owe this call, Lady Ransome?" said Kate, a little nettled at the apparent liberty.

"Simply to see the Earl of Crondace, whom I

regret to say I have not been able to visit on account of my being abroad. How is he? Please relieve my cruel anxiety."

"Might I inquire if you are a relative of my—*the Earl!*" a pang of jealousy shooting through her heart.

"I am nearer and dearer than any relative, Mrs. Lonsdale!" her ladyship answered, quickly.

"No—no! In Heaven's name do not say that you are his wife!" exclaimed Kate, blanching a deadly white.

Clutching Kate's arm in a vice-like grip, her visitor said, hoarse with emotion,—

"He is not dead! Oh! do not torture me my love—my love! Am I too late?"

Snatching her arm away as if from the hateful clutch of an adder, Kate started back, exclaiming,—

"How dare you avow love for my husband in my presence?"

"Are you crazed, woman?" she demanded, fiercely, her eyes glittering with jealous wrath.

"Mad! No, though I have had enough misery to make me so. I tell you that the man who lies under my roof, succoured by me, is my husband, and the father of my child!"

"It is false—false as perdition!" hissed, rather than spoke, her ladyship. "Come with me!" seizing hold of her arm, frantically, "and confront him. If he has dared to play me false he shall rue it." And this tall, stately woman looked like some enraged panther about to be robbed of her prey. All the Spanish blood of her race surged like lava through her veins and maddened her.

"Why should I not?" Kate cried, a ring of truth in her voice. "I have witnessed that what I assert is true. I have done you no wrong."

"Will you come?" persisted Lady Ransome, savagely, fury blazing in her dusky, midnight eyes.

"Have you no pity for his weakness?" Kate cried, reproachfully; "the shock might kill him!"

"Let it," she said, pitilessly; "better that than to hear him call you wife."

Impelled against her own will by one who seemed to sway her as a bulrush is swayed in a fierce storm, Kate was forced along to the Earl's room. She had, perchance, to accept the challenge thrown down so ruthlessly by her rival.

"Be merciful to him! Remember, he has only just come back from the grave!" pleaded Kate, on nearing the room. "Your words wrung my confession from me."

"Then it is false, you admit that?" retorted her ladyship, with biting sarcasm in her voice, that made Kate almost as mad with rage as she herself was.

"Come in! You shall soon know whether I am speaking the truth," she said, in a passionate whisper.

No wonder that the invalid looked in bewildered perplexity at the two women who entered his room so unceremoniously, for on the face of each was depicted an accusation—a look of passionate hate, too, on that of Lady Ransome, who saw by the way he shrank back that Kate had spoken the bitter, galling truth.

"Is this woman your wife?" she demanded, imperiously, drawing her grandly-developed figure up to its full height.

Dazed, stupefied by the sudden apparition of Kate, the woman he had so cruelly wronged, he could not speak; his tongue refused its office.

Breaking away from this Medusa, who had dared to impugn her veracity, Kate threw herself on her knees at his side, and, taking his hand, said,—

"Do not let her insults add to my misery. Tell her, dear Richard, that I am your lawful wife."

"I dare not say that, for it would be false," he said, slowly, as if each word was forced through his unwilling lips by some invisible power.

"There, madam," her ladyship ejaculated, triumphantly, "you see that I was right. He is too honourable to play me false."

Springing to her feet, Kate faced her, her face

afame with virtuous wrath, her eyes literally cowering her as she cried,—

"He has played you false, for I am his wedded wife."

"Spare me this wretched scene," he urged. "I am weak and ill, and in no fit state to defend myself against this accusation."

"You shall own the truth, Richard Lonsdale," cried Kate, stamping her foot. "I am not the weak, defenceless girl you once deemed me. This house is mine. I have returned good for evil in sheltering and nursing you back to life.

If there is a spark of manhood left in you, tell this heartless woman the truth. I have a witness in this house; and my marriage certificate, which can easily be procured, will prove even to her, that in a moment of weakness I consented to wed one who is now repudiating me, insulting me, before this woman who dares to come between us. You are a father, think of that before you pursue the road to ruin; for as sure as there is a Heaven above us, I will make the whole world ring with your perfidy, and she shall share in your shame."

He cowered before her, his false heart stabbed through and through by these words of biting truth; and it needed no accusing voice to tell Lady Ransome that if Kate was not his lawful wife the fault lay at his door, not hers.

"Come away with me, dear Richard!" Lady Ransome implored. "This seems to be a matter for your solicitor; your life would not be safe here."

"Life!" cried Kate, a contemptuous ring in her usually gentle voice. "I have helped to give it back to him, and was insane enough to think that he would show me some gratitude; but instead of that he turns the gift into a sword, and by base, wicked, false words, seeks to slay my honour. Take him, madam; but see that you do not wed him, or disgrace, shame, infamy, will be your lot. You have warned you, and surely, if you are a woman in heart, you would not care for another woman's husband!"

These words struck home.

Kate was for the moment victor over both; and she revelled in her victory, which repaid her for months of misery and anguish.

It was to be war now; and guarded as she was by gold—that mighty engine, that symbol of worldly power—it would go hard with her if she did not win in the coming contest.

(To be concluded in our next.)

One of the masterpieces of musical clocks has just been completed for the Emperor of China, in whose palace, besides pointing out the correct time, it will play selections with a fully equipped automatic orchestra. It is pronounced the most complete musical automaton in the world, having eight divisions, each of which has a repertoire of eight melodies. All of the pieces played by this musical clock were selected by the Emperor himself, and consist of forty foreign and twenty-four Chinese recitals.

PRIMITIVE man originally subsisted on a diet consisting purely of fruits and roots; but though fruitiferous by instinct and by reason of the conformation of his digestive organs and dental system, in which respect he is nearly allied to the apes, which are all fruit-eating animals in their natural state, he soon became omnivorous from necessity, and his stomach readily adapted itself to every kind of food. If the Darwinian theory be accepted, and the descent of man from simian ancestors be granted, we have further argument in support of the fact that flesh-eating was the outcome of civilisation and climatic necessity rather than of natural craving. Exposed at the epoch of the great extension of the glacier, which at one time covered all our mountain, to the hardships of an inclement climate, man required something more nourishing and heat-supplying than the vegetable diet which sufficed for him in a higher temperature; and in the paleolithic age we find him not only destroying animal life, but provided with and utilising the means of cooking the victims of his

rough-hewn knife and spear.

NELL'S CAKES.

—101—

"You don't really mean it, Nell, do you?" Bessie asked, rather dubiously.

"Why not?" was the stout reply, and Nell's blue eyes had a look in them which, as Bessie knew, meant business. "Am I to let Hal give up his medical studies when we all know he is bound to make a great doctor some day, and be an ornament to the family—am I to let him give it all up, I say, just because I am too proud to let anyone see me making cakes?"

"Yes; but it isn't just what a lady usually does, my dear!" said her friend, still doubtfully. "What would your cousins—those Lions—say, if they saw you baking cakes publicly at the Food Exhibition?"

Nell laughed in her merry way till her white teeth showed, and the most entrancing dimples played about her sweet mouth.

"I have no doubt the Lions would commit me to Bedlam, if they could," she said, laughingly. "But I am going to do it, Bessie!" The baking powder people have offered me a handsome sum, and I can't afford to refuse it!"

"Well," said Bessie, accepting the inevitable. "When a woman will, she will, you may depend on it!" I wouldn't mind, Nell, but I know just how the men will stand and stare at you" (Nell tossed her pretty head), "and they will say familiar things to you!"

"No, they won't!" said Nell, with a flash in her eyes. "I'd like to see any man speak to me if I didn't want him to!"

Bessie looked at her haughty pose and smiled.

"I guess you can take care of yourself," she said, admiringly. "Well, my dear, I wish you good luck with your cakes!"

When the Food Exhibition opened Nell was there, and Bessie, who went to see her, thought the baking powder people had been very wise.

Nell wore a plain print dress. Her sleeves came just to the elbow, and her round white arms which were thrust in a big bowl of flour, were set off by little white embroidered ruffles.

A pretty white cap half hid her fair hair, and a snowy-white apron completed a costume that, in a certain way, was much more attractive than a ball dress.

"Nell," said Bessie, enthusiastically, "you look good enough to eat yourself!"

"Thank you!" said the pretty cook, as she handed a fresh tray of cakes to a boy in a white linen suit, who was carrying relays to and from the oven.

"There, Johnny—that's the fifteenth! Tell Maria not to glass these. Don't they look nice?" she continued, waving her hand towards a pile of golden-brown, smoking cakes which were lying on a dish, surrounded by little figured pats of butter. "I have sold a hundred tins of baking powder already."

"Nell," said Bessie, admiringly, "you will make your fortune yet!"

The Food Exhibition was crowded that evening, and never for a minute was there a lack of spectators about the baking powder exhibit, where Nell was making her cakes and passing them out among the crowd.

The work and the heat had flushed her face a lovely red, and it must be admitted that people paid more attention to her than they did to the cakes.

"By Jove, Beverley!" said one of the men who sauntered that way. "There's a confoundedly pretty girl baking cakes over there! See her!"

Beverley kissed the tips of his kid gloves artfully and moved towards the stand where Nell was.

"A duced pretty girl!" he drawled, quite audibly, as he leaned over the rail and watched the delf white fingers sifting flour. "What the dickens is she doing here!"

"Sh!" said his companion; "she'll hear you."

"Well, there is no offence, old man," said Beverley, still in the same audible tone. "No woman ever resents any praise of her beauty."

He turned as he spoke, and, leaning over the rail, he looked boldly up into Nell's eyes.

"Don't you get awfully hot and tired here?" he said, pulling his attenuated moustache in a dudish way.

Nell bit her lip.

"There, Johnny!" she said, turning her back quickly. "You must get these a little browner than the last ones."

Beverley waited a moment.

"Won't you give me a cake?" he said, with the air of one who was asking for a kiss.

"The cakes are distributed on the other side of the stand, sir," said Nell, without lifting her eyes from her work.

"You'd better shut up," said the other gentleman, in a low tone. "You are evidently on the wrong tack."

Beverley paid no attention to his friend. He simply pulled his moustache more persistently, and said,—

"But a cake from your hands would gain additional acceptance. Will you not honour me with the favour?"

Nell was still silent and implacable, and he added,—

"Why are you so unfriendly? You look very hot and tired; won't you let me bring you some ice cream?"

"No!" said Nell, turning upon him with quick anger. "I will thank you to let me alone. I am attending to my business, and I wish you would attend to yours."

"Oh, come now!" Beverley went on insolently.

But his friend seized him by the arm, and dragged him aside.

"See here," he cried. "You've got to come away from here! Don't you see you are annoying the lady?"

"Annoying her!" Beverley retorted with a laugh, as he shook himself free. "What a milk-sop you are, Jackson! You let me alone, will you?"

"No, I won't!—not if you are going to annoy that lady with your unwelcome attentions!"

"The deuce you won't!" said Beverley, his voice growing higher and more angry, till people began to look around, and query what the matter was.

"Gentlemen, if you please!" said Nell, in a dignified voice. "Move on!"

"I'll be hanged if I'll let any man dictate to me what I shall do!" cried Beverley, angrily.

"See here, old man," said Jackson, persuasively, "that last champagne has gone to your head. Come! I don't make a scene here!"

"I want one of those cakes," the other persisted, "and I'm going to have it!"

Jackson caught him by the shoulder, and pushed him through the crowd; but Beverley was furious.

Certainly he was somewhat the worse for his wine, for he whirled round, and struck his friend across the cheek.

There was a crowd in a minute; but Nell, who was in an agony of shame, had the satisfaction of seeing both men marched off very promptly by the police.

Tears came to her eyes as she went on mixing the cakes. Bessie had been pretty nearly right after all.

The people stared at her; one whispered to another, and pointed at her.

Her cheeks were crimson with mortification; but, fortunately, it was almost time to close, and she could go home to weep her chagrin out on her own pillow.

She told no one about it, but went back the next day doubly resolved to wear a mask of impenetrable reserve. She would not look at anybody; and when she saw coming towards her a man who had one cheek freely decorated with court-plaster, she looked stubbornly away.

"I beg your pardon," he said, lifting his hat, "but may I speak to you a moment?"

At a glance Nell recognised Jackson, and coloured.

"I—I have been very anxious to speak to you ever since last night!" he said, hurriedly. "I

am very sorry for that unfortunate occurrence, and I have come to apologize!"

He drew out his card-case as he spoke, and handed her a card, on which she read, with some surprise, the name—

"LIONEL JACKSON."

"I am truly sorry for what happened!" he went on. "The fact is, my friend had had a little too much champagne last night, and he is awfully ashamed of himself! He hadn't the face to come and see you, but he wanted me to apologize for him. And," he added, with a faint smile, "I think he has been well punished. They kept him all night in the station-house."

"I think you have been punished, too!" Nell said, glancing at his plastered face.

"Oh, that isn't anything!"

"I—I think I am obliged to you in one way," Nell said, slowly. "You did try to make him behave."

"I am afraid I was more zealous than discreet. At any rate, I am very sorry for it all!"

"Well, it is all over now. And," she added, lifting her eyes, "I have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of someone of whom I have heard very often, through my mother, Mrs. Trenton."

"What! You are not——"

"I am—your second cousin, if you don't mind the truth," said Nell, demurely.

Jackson looked at her for a moment in amazement.

"I have heard of you," he said, presently. "Your name is Nell, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"But," he continued, "what are you doing here?"

"I am earning my bread, as well as making it," she said, with a smile. "Will you have a cake?"

"Thanks! They look awfully good! But you have a brother, haven't you?"

"Hal! yes. Hal's at college, and the family finances being at a low ebb, I am here."

"Does Hal know it?"

"No, indeed!"

"I thought not."

"You must buy a box of baking powder now," said Nell, as he finished the cake.

"Half-a-dozen!" Jackson answered. "But what shall I do with it? Is it good for anything besides making cakes?"

"It will lighten all manner of sadness," said Nell, as she gave him the whole six tins. "There, please! Now you are to go away. I can't stand here talking to young men, you know."

"But you have not accepted my apology."

"Oh, yes, I have!"

"May I come and get another cake to-morrow?"

"If you buy some more baking powder!"

Jackson laughed, and went away much pleased with himself.

Every day after that he attended the Food Exhibition, and bought a tin of baking powder.

When the Exhibition was over, a month later, he called on Nell, by her permission, and brought a large vase full of the unopened tins.

"I want you to take these," he said; "I don't know what to do with them!"

"But what do you want me to do with them?" said Nell, laughing.

"I wish you would continue to make cakes for me all my life!" he said, looking her in the eyes with an expression that brought the colour to her cheeks. "Nell, could anything induce a good, brave girl like you to marry a worthless fellow like me?"

"Something might," she said, demurely.

"What?" was his eager reply.

"Love—I—nothing else!"

"But I do love you!" he went on. "From the very first your face charmed me! Then I admired your independent spirit! and then I learned to love your sweet, womanly self! Nell, if you ever could care enough for me——"

She held out her hand.

"I do!" she said, softly; and Jackson saw the light of his own happiness in her eyes.

When Bessie heard of it she was ecstatic.

"To think you should have captured one of the rich Lions! by baking cakes!" she said with a rapturous sigh.

And now that Nell is married, and Bessie visits her, they have together what they call "cake tea," in memory of how Nell won "the best husband in the world!"

One of the most remarkable lakes on the earth's surface is situated at Tar Point, on the Island of Trinidad, and bears the suggestive name of Pitch-Lake. At first view the surface of this "lake, which is not a lake," gives one the impression that it is a large body of placid water, but a closer examination proves it to be a vast plain covered with hard and hardening pitch. In the winter months, the surface of this lake is perfectly smooth and of a consistency sufficient to bear any weight.

An insect that can climb—at least up to six—is the curious discovery with which Lieutenant-Colonel Delaunay, of the French army, credits himself. The creature is a hemipter, about an eighth of an inch long, and was seen in a garden of Noumea, New Caledonia, attention being attracted by its singular turning on its own head as a pivot, while resting on a banana-leaf. After a pause of a quarter of an hour, the movements began again, when the observer was able to make the following record: Six turns in the direction of the hands of a watch, then a stop; six turns in the opposite direction, a stop; five turns in the first direction, a stop; and so on in descending order until finally one turn was made in each direction. Then the insect stopped, remaining still immovable at the end of an hour. Only two specimens of the insect were found, and both were, unfortunately, lost. The mysterious creature was observed on only one occasion.

A SPLENDID OFFER IN SEWING MACHINES.—Although a sewing machine is indispensable to every well-regulated home, and while of late years the price of machines has been greatly reduced, yet they are still at a figure considerably beyond the means of many women who would find a sewing machine of so much assistance to them in their ordinary sewing, or more particularly, in dressmaking. This difficulty may now be overcome. Our readers will thank us for calling their attention to the Atlas Sewing Machine Company, 184, High-street, Camden Town, N.W., who have made a beautiful shuttle lock-stitch machine (the Atlas "B"), which is worth £4 12s, but which they offer at 39s, or by monthly instalments of 5s for £2 2s. This company guarantee their machines for four years, and, moreover, allow anyone who wishes to buy a machine to have one on trial for a month on receipt of a deposit of 5s. Such an offer at once proves its value, and never before has a shuttle lock-stitch machine been offered at this price. The price includes hammers, binders, braider, tacking guide, corder, quilter, and, of course, all the necessary implements for oiling and keeping the works in order. To those who are in deep consideration over wedding presents they cannot do better than give their young bride an Atlas "B" sewing machine, as it will prove one, if not the best, of her household treasures. For heavier work, such as that of a dressmaker, or a house in which a great deal of dressmaking is done at home, it might be advisable to select a stronger machine, such as the Atlas "A" of the same company. The price of this is only £2 10s. complete, or £2 15s. If paid for in monthly instalments of 5s, its advantages are the greater strength of its working part, the ease and rapidity of working caused by the internal gearing for the driving wheel, and other points, besides the extra large space under the arm, although all the Atlas machines have large cloth plates and good space under the arm. The heaviest and the lightest fabrics can be worked on with this machine, the only thing required to adapt it for different classes of work being a slight alteration in the tension and size of stitch.

BROWN EYES AND BLUE.

CHAPTER XII.

"A little cloud comes sailing, sailing o'er the crystal sea!"

I THINK Fate must have heard my prayer, and, being in a tender-hearted mood, taken good heed of my petition for happiness, for with the week's end Collin and I have floated into smoother waters.

Disagreeables have vanished like shadows into thin air, and Gable End is once more sweet Arcadia.

Aunt's purr is again heard on the hearth, and she went so far as to express a tolerable amount of regret for having spoken to me as she did, adding that poor Michael's sorrow made her beside herself.

"Of course she 'did not, could not, mean what she said to her sweet niece, Celia,'" and I must forgive her.

It's easy enough to forgive, but terribly hard to forget, I find; however, as I am once more a "precious," I ought, I suppose, to be correspondingly content.

Lella is still here, too. Aunt quite clings to her companionship, seemingly, and is loth to let her go; hence I conclude she will remain a fixture at Gable End for the present.

Well, it matters not to me now. She, too, apologized to me the following morning.

"You mustn't mind what I said, you know, Celia. My tongue always runs away with me, and I really did think Collin Broughton liked me, only I was awfully mistaken. You see, I can't afford to pick and choose. I've no money, and only a fair amount of good looks as my share of a bargain, so I must have been an awful fool to imagine he'd take the trouble to ask me. His loss won't break my heart though, never fear, so forgive what I said. Of course he'd rather have you than me. I'm a pauper—you're not."

There was a mixture of sneer in Lella's repentence which I could not help noticing; however, that is generally Lella's way, so I must not be surprised, and I heartily forgive her, as she asked.

Michael has never broached the subject at all. But, then, I had no quarrel with him, poor fellow, and he continues to treat me just as he always did; so plainly he has in this case forgiven me.

Father has had a charming letter from Sir Hugh Broughton, and one from Collin's mother. They are coming down in September to visit us at Gable End, and express all sorts of kind wishes and pleasant messages.

Hence, you see, Fate certainly did bear that prayer of mine, and has duly attended to it. The course of my true love is running quite smooth now. May it continue to do so!

Thus another week floats away to join the never-ending past, and then comes my first parting from Collin.

Somehow the idea of his going away from Marling and leaving me alone has never presented itself to my otherwise vivid imagination.

The blankness of separation has not occurred to me at all in any shape or form until it looms full and lifelike right upon me.

My ship was sailing over the sea of love so easily, quietly, and delightfully, that a good-bye, though only for a short time, comes most unpleasantly.

I am gathering morello cherries for Prudence just after breakfast, when who should appear on the scene but Collin, and I notice at once, without any question or answer simply in the tone he takes his good-morrow from me, that something is amiss.

"Good morning, Blue Eyes," he says, putting his arm round me, and kissing each cheek in turn. Blue Eyes is his own especial baptism, in memory of our waterside meeting, which seems now so very long ago. "Are you too busy at present to come and have a quiet chat somewhere?" he ends, as soon as this interesting ceremony is concluded.

Our day is usually devoted to "quiet chats," I find, though they do not, as a rule, begin quite so early in the forenoon. There is, therefore, nothing unprecedented in this remark, or calculated to arouse suspicion.

"My dear boy," I return calmly, feeling that, now he belongs to me, I may patronise him as much as ever I like, for all his twenty-eight years, "can't we chat quietly here while I am gathering Prudence her cherries for cherry brandy, which you know you are fond of? They must be gathered to-day, or the birds and wasps will do it for us. We are perpetually chatting it strikes me. Why, there'll be nothing left to chat about very soon; we shall have exhausted it all."

"Ah, but this is a particular chat, dearest, on a particular subject. I came early on purpose, because, do you know, I shall have to run away from Marling either to-night or to-morrow morning."

"Colin!" I cry, in deepest amazement. "Leave Marling and me? Why, whatever is the matter?"

"Don't look so tragical, Blue Eyes!" he returns, laughing at my evident dismay. "I have not murdered anyone, or been a Blue Beard, or scandalised the Rectory. Don't look at me as if I had, please. When you've picked your cherries, I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh! never mind the cherries," I say, with all the inconsistency of my sex, mingled with intense curiosity as to what can possibly cause Collin to leave Marling; "they must wait a little time. I dare say the wasps won't mind. Come, we'll go to the orchard," laying my basket down and covering over the fruit I have plucked with a huge rhubarb leaf. Then, linking my arm through his, we wander off to the orchard and my hammock, remnant of poor Michael's devotion. "Now begin. Tell me all, everything; the minutest scrap, remember. The why and wherefore, and reason. You bad boy to talk of going away like that!" I say, severely, looking up at him with anything but a severe look on my face for all my words.

"The fact is, Blue Eyes, I'm bothered," he begins slowly, in answer to my expressed command.

"I suppose you are, as you speak of going away," I return, with a smile. "Men usually do go when they're bothered. Who is the botherer pray, may I ask? Am I the unlucky individual? Have I been flirting with the sun, put too much sugar in your tea, or given you a wrong flower for your buttonhole?" sitting in the hammock and lazily swinging it to and fro with one hand.

"You naughty little thing, you know it's not that. I'm sorry to say it's much more serious than any of the three things you name," he answers, gravely. "I'm not joking, dear, really."

"Collin, you've two wrinkles on your forehead, quite deep wrinkles, and I don't like them at all. Unwrinkle them at once. Come here and let me smooth them away, and I won't joke any more. We'll talk over so seriously, but no wrinkles, mind."

He kisses me, and the forehead gets smooth.

"Well, now to business. What is it, who is it, and what is its shape?" and I take his fingers in mine.

"It's a money bother, little one," he returns ruminally, after a pause.

"That's bad, dear. But how and why a money bother? What sort of a money bother I mean?"

"A bad sort—a confoundedly bad sort," he answers, rather forcibly, but it is evidently no light matter, and so Collin shall be allowed vigorous speech, if it will do him any good. "The truth is, I've had a letter from my brother Daryl this morning, which has upset me awfully."

"From your brother. Oh! then the money bother is connected with him and not you?" I exclaim, relieved in my mind, for all sorts of things were careering through my mind, conjured up by Collin's words. "What does he say?"

"What doesn't he say, Blue Eyes, would be nearer the mark I fancy. A letter as long as

your arm, full of self-reproaches and regrets, and walls against his luck, as he calls it. I never saw such a fellow as he is; no sooner out of one scrape than he's in another. He tells me he's in an awful mess now, and from what he writes I can quite believe it."

"And he wants you to get him out of it, I suppose?" I ask, calmly, for Colin has told me a good deal about his elder brother from time to time since our engagement, and it has always struck me that my future brother-in-law invariably pressed Colin into his service when any special scrape hemmed him in, and expected the younger to help him free again, instead of going first to him for advice or suggestion. From what I have heard about my future relative, one might, without untruth, call him a rascal.

"Just so, little one; you've hit the right nail on the head this time. That is exactly what he does want. Unfortunately I am afraid I can't help him this time," says Colin, throwing himself down on the grass at my feet. "I fear it's quite beyond my help."

"What does he want you to do, dear?" I ask at length, as my lover remains ruefully silent, plucking up little tufts of grass near him, and making miniature hats with them.

"To go up to town at once without any delay and see him about it. It's an awful nuisance, because I don't want to go, not but what I feel I've overstayed my time with the Barlows already. Only they're both such dear kind souls, and Miss Hannah such a thorough sweet old matchmaker, who won't listen to my apologies for remaining so long, but declares she is glad to have me, otherwise, my darling, I know I ought to relieve them of my presence by this time. But now it's not a question of like or dislike, but one of must!"

"But why does Daryl want you so particularly, Colin? Why must it be you to help him? Why can't he go to your father?" I ask, perplexedly, for I do not see why my poor Colin should be dragged into whatever Daryl chooses to do."

"He could not do that. He has written to me because he says I am the only man who can help him in his strait. Poor old fellow, he's full of regrets now it's done. I do wish he'd regret first in these scrapes of his. It's no use wishing that though now the thing is done."

"What has he done, Colin, dear? You need not mind telling me, and you may be sure I should not talk about it if you did not wish me to," I put in, earnestly.

"My Blue Eyes, I know I can trust you perfectly. Daryl did not swear me to secrecy, besides, as you will be one of the family before so very long, it may be as well you should know beforehand all its faults and failings. Only promise not to throw me over, that's all, because I've got a rip of a brother."

"My dear old melancholy boy, what nonsense you do talk. Now, tell me, does your father know about this, whatever it is?"

"Oh no," he answers quickly, "not a syllable. I would not have him know for worlds—neither would Daryl. It's the fear of that which makes him in such a fever of anxiety for me to come up at once and see what can be done. I suppose affairs are approaching a crisis or I should have been left in peace a little longer," and he heaves a heavy sigh.

"Is it very bad, then?" I query presently, rather weighed down by my lover's evident uneasiness of mind.

"About as bad as it well can be, dearest. You see Daryl is always dead on horse-racing, and he's been most unlucky with his bets all this year. Derby and Ascot have both been terribly bitter experiences to him, and he's regularly hemmed himself in with heavy racing debts."

"Can't he pay them, then?" I query again, beginning to see how the land lay as regards the money bother.

"No;" he returns slowly, "he can't. He knew he couldn't pay if he lost when he bet, that's where my brother shows his want of principle. Of course he thought he'd win. He always does think he's going to win until he loses, and then comes the struggle to pay. It isn't the first time I've been through it with him, and yet

he won't take warning. But this seems a worse business than any previous one, I'm afraid, from what I can gather by his incoherent kind of letter. He can't pay up, though, for we Boughtons are poor, my Blue Eyes! I told you that, didn't I, when I asked you to give me yourself? he ends quite sadly, as if it really were a crime to be poor.

"What does it matter, you dear old thing, whether you are a millionaire or not? At least it does not matter to me, and I am about the most interested party, am I not?"

"Ah! but I don't like it," he goes on, still restlessly plucking the grass. "People may call me mercenary, and a few other hard names. Only don't believe them, my darling. Only believe that I love you with all my heart and soul. That is true enough, I can swear."

"I'll believe you without that," I put in, promptly, with a smile at his vehemence, which, however, is very pleasant to hear; "well, what about Daryl?"

"Yes, I was wandering from the subject, wasn't I. It seems a shame to burden you with the list of my brother's pécadilles in the shape of racing debts, though; shall we talk of something else?"

"No, I answer, decidedly, "something must be done, of course, and I wish to know all, everything, as I said at first. What will he do?"

"It isn't a question of what he will do now, it's what he has done. You see he was obliged to pay up those racing debts at once."

"Oh! he has paid them!" I exclaim, wondering why he should be in such a state of mind since they were paid.

"Wait a moment, my darling. Your sweet little tongue runs on too fast for me. To pay those debts of honour, as he chooses to call them, he drew bills for the various sums, which were discounted by the money-lenders. Those bills were backed with my father's name," he ends, sighing.

"Sir Hugh does know, then?" I interrupt again, more and more mystified, as he unravels the tangled skein. "I thought you said just now he did not?"

"What I said just now was a fact, Colin dearest," he says, rising to his feet, and coming to stand close beside me as I sit in my hammock. "My poor father has no knowledge of those bills."

"I don't understand, Colin," I falter wonderingly, looking up in my betrothed's face, and noting the troubled look of those dear, brown eyes.

"No, my darling. I can quite understand that, of course you do not," he responds, hurriedly, avoiding meeting my eyes. "How should you know here in Arcadia? The world is very full of evil, Blue Eyes; fuller of guile than you can even dream of. I am telling you this, because, dear, I would not have you say in the future that I had ever concealed anything from you, and rumour has such a malicious tongue. Rumour might set your little heart a-beating ceaselessly, so you shall hear all, everything as you wish. My father's name on the back of those bills is a forgery!"

He had taken my hand in his, and I now feel the grasp tighten as if he feared I might draw it away, and so mark my sense of distrust and avoidance. I close my fingers tighter on his as I answer, bewilderedly, —

"A forgery, Colin! Oh, how terrible!"

"Terrible! Sorry horrible, shameful, criminally disgraceful. Believe me, it costs me no small pang to tell you this, for we Boughtons are proud enough, at any rate, and we have never numbered a forger in our race," he returns, bitterly. "If my father gets to hear it, it will kill him, I believe."

"But will he, do you think?" I ask, shocked at this aspect of affairs, and still in a state of mental wonder and mystification at the whole history.

"For myself I cannot see how it is to be prevented," he answers, sorrowfully; "when those bills are presented for payment, most certainly Daryl cannot meet them, he declares he hasn't a spare ten-pound note."

"Then what will happen?"

"Why, they will come before my father, and he will then learn the whole, shameful truth, that his son and heir has forged his name to meet his racing debts. There is no loophole of escape that I can see, unless—"

"Unless what, Colin?" I ask, looking up searchingly into his face.

"Unless those bill are paid either before or when they fall due," he answers, slowly.

"And cannot they be, by any means whatever?"

"Where is the money to come from, my Blue Eyes, tell me that if you can! Not from the Boughton coffers, I am very certain. Why, the total would swamp Haughtayne for years to come—" Haughtayne is the Boughton estate—"besides," he goes on, quickly, "when my father sees those bills he will be so furious that if he had the money lying ready at his bankers I do not think he would pay it to shield Daryl. Sir Hugh is a man of metal, and has a stern sense of the family honour. You will say so when you know him."

"Surely, Colin, dear, your brother contemplated all this before he did it?"

"My sweet little daisy, Daryl, as usual, trusted to luck—trusted that something would turn up to relieve him of these heavy responsibilities, and, as usual, he found himself mistaken. He is relying now on Goodwood, and I expect will only plunge deeper in the mire in consequence. In the meantime he asks me to devise some scheme for rescuing those bills from getting to my father, as if I could do anything to prevent it. Why, I am powerless, I have no spare thousands to throw away. If I had, he would be welcome to them, I am sure."

"What do you think Sir Hugh will do?" I query, after a pause. "Will he be very angry? What will he say?"

"He will disown his signature at once, of that I am certain. Proclaim it a forgery; cut off the entail, Haughtayne is entailed property you know, and probably break his heart into the bargain."

"How dreadful! And what will become of Daryl, dear?"

"Well, he will be arrested for forgery, tried, found guilty, and sentenced. The heir of Haughtayne will be a convict, and the Boughtons irretrievably disgraced. You had better send me about my business at once, my darling, before it all comes out. Mr. Lascelles will not care about his daughter being allied to the brother of a convict, will he?" he ends moodily.

"Hush, dear, don't speak like that. My father will be just, I am certain, and we cannot help what Daryl has done. It would take more than that to make me send you away, as you term it—that is, of my own accord. Can you think of no way to avoid the exposure?"

"None, but by paying the money. If I were to sell out and hand Daryl over my commission money, it wouldn't be sufficient to meet those accrued bills, or I would do it at once to save our name," and poor Colin groans.

"I do wish I could help you, poor old darling. I mean money help. You know I shall be quite a rich girl some day, and my money is lying idle, as it were, and doing nothing, only I cannot touch it yet—no one can indeed, until father leaves me, so I might almost as well be poor, mightn't I, for all the help I can be! Therefore, you silly boy, no one can call you mercenary, as you said just now, because father will live five years to come, and we might both easily die before he did."

"My Blue Eyes, I fear they will try and take you from me," he says, wrapping his arms round me, and holding me close. "I feel a horrible presentiment something will happen to drift us apart—that there is a tiny cloud coming up on the horizon to shadow us. I cannot define why I think so, only the thought will present itself somehow."

"Now, my dear boy, you are beginning to talk nonsense," I answer, consolingly; "we have had our small cloud already, it has passed over us, and sailed away. Put away your presentiments, and be very sure I am not likely to throw you over."

"My darling, I would not doubt you for worlds," he returns, drawing my head against his

breast. "I do not think you are only a fair weather Celia. Remember that no one can love you more fondly and devotedly than I do, if you should wish to send me desolate away."

"But I shall not wish," I put in, obstinately; "why will you harp upon that theme? Oh! you silly, foolish old boy. When you come back you will find me just the very same Celia you left. Of course you must go, there's no help for it, but I do not see why you should imagine all sorts of horrible things will happen while you are away, which will not be for long, I hope. Why, one would think years, and not a few days, were to separate us. Think how nice it will be to come back; we can have our quiet chats to our hearts' content then, and such heaps of fresh things to say. What time do you go?"

"Well, I've sent a telegram to Daryl to wire me back whether he wants me at once. I shall probably get an answer this afternoon, and, if it's imperative, shall start by the early train to-morrow morning."

"And when will you come back?"

"In a week—perhaps less if I can, you small darling. I shall not stay any longer than I can help. My leave is nearly up now, and I want to have as much of my Blue Eyes as I can before it's over. Why there's Marling clock striking twelve, and I've been here more than two hours. I must get back to see if that telegram has arrived. If I have to go to-morrow morning I'll run in to-night and say good-bye, as I shall be off too early to-morrow to see you. And mind, when I'm gone, you're to think of me very often, and blow me a good-night kiss every night."

"I do believe you're a sentimental Colin," I say, smiling up at him.

"Perhaps I am. Only I want you not to think of anybody but me, and I shall want to hear the history of every day, mind, when I come back. Now I must go. Good-bye, you sweet little darling," and, kissing me fervently, away she goes, while I saunter back to finish gathering my cherries. I find the wasps busy enough when I reach the wall; they, at least, have had a good time of it, and profited by my two hours' absence, so you must own 'tis indeed an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

What an odd, frail, curious world it all is; but I know I love Colin, and nothing shall come between our two hearts to rive them asunder. Of that I am fully determined—not if we have to sweep a crossing together, or quaver forth melodies from street to street, to earn our daily bread. At any rate, Colin can sing, that's one comfort, and I'm not a large eater.

"Get off, wasps, you've had your feast for to-day. Don't be gourmands."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Love reckons hours for months, and days for years, and every little absence is an age!"

TAKE my advice, and don't let Eros find you sleeping when he comes and looks in at the window of your heart to seek a resting place. Be wide-awake, and bid him go elsewhere, for he is a troublesome visitor, though so sweet-tongued, and smiling-faced, that you may feel inclined to give him hearty welcome at sight of him.

Colin has gone, and never hitherto in my young life have I felt so inexplicably dull, so utterly lost as I do now, quite unable to settle down to anything whatever. Eros has a great deal to answer for, be sure of that. Small need for Colin to ask me to think only of him all day, for I can do nothing else. I wonder whereabouts he is at each particular hour, what he is doing, saying, laughing or sighing, whether thinking of me or not. I feel this is absolutely puerile, but what can I do to prevent it? Nothing seemingly. I positively was so exceedingly foolish as to shed tears when he came to say his good-bye that same evening of our talk over Daryl, and I feel so—so very lonely without him.

I have been forced to enlist Miss Hannah's good offices to cure my loneliness, and spend nearly all my time moaning disconsolately about the Rectory, in search of any relics of past

delight; sitting mournfully in the swing, wishing vainly he were there to swing me, or gathering up his stray cigarette ends into a little heap, his *jacets*, as a monument to his memory. It is to be hoped I shall not always be like this when Colin leaves me for a week, or I shall be in a bad case, it strikes me.

Leila has attempted to fill up the breach, by proclaiming her wish that I should dilate on Colin to my heart's content in her private ear.

"Talk about him as much as ever you like, Celia! Don't mind me a bit. Say whatever you please, if it's any relief to your feelings. I'm used to lovers' rhapsodies; Richard entertains me on the charms of some fresh damsel on an average about once a month, and it seems to relieve him. Possibly it may do the same for you. Anyway, if you feel inclined to try it as a remedy, I shall not mind."

She seemed so full of *bonhomie* when she said this, that looking at her I wondered really whether it could be the same Leila who had spoken so blithely to me only a short time back. Was it sneer or smile on her lips; verily I could not determine; however, I took it as it sounded, and returned gaily—

"Thanks, Leila, but I am not a rhapsodist, and don't feel at all inclined to relieve my feelings in such wise."

"Did he tell you what took him away in such a hurry?" she asked me the next moment, eying me curiously the while she asked the question. Leila is objectionable in excess only when she is curious. But I am not the village pump, and if she had any latent design of being pumper I fear it would end in disappointment.

"I know why he went, yes!" I returned, placidly, busy knitting a steel bead and silk purse, destined for Colin. I know he will never use it, and it is tolerably heavy, still, I like to think I am doing something for him while he is away.

"I suppose he has gone to settle up old scores!" she went on pleasantly, watching me picking up the bright little beads one by one, and knitting them closely in. "Now he is going to turn Benedict, he intends settling down into the quiet married man. Very much married!"—with a laugh and her shrug. "He'll have to burn all his love-letters. What a heap they will make! Destroy all the tender souvenirs of loves gone by, and be good boy for the future," and she threw herself back in her chair to mark what effect this little speech might have upon me.

"Yes! no doubt he will!" I answered nonchalantly. I was horribly, fiercely jealous once, and I do not intend that the green-eyed monster shall be 'my old man of the sea' a second time. Oh dear no. Love shall not play me such a sorry trick as that again.

"Well, Colin Boughton has had his fling most certainly" she said, tilting her chair to and fro, her hands clasped under her head.

"Probably. One cannot be young twice. Old age and faded flowers, no remedies can revive; and I hate milkshops!" trenchantly.

"That's lucky for you, Celia, let me tell you," in a dry tone. "No one can accuse him of being a milkshop. Mind you, I consider it only fair to let you know that he is considered to be in rather a fast set up in town. Of course I hear these things through Richard."

"Which is no reason why they should penetrate through you to me. Possibly your brother has mistaken Colin for his elder brother Daryl. Colin has been abroad with his regiment until last autumn, but his brother is about town, as you call it. One is so easily mistaken, especially when there is no personal knowledge on the question."

This is a little poke back at Leila, for I know that "Richard" is not usually received in that set where Daryl disports himself, but if she chooses to fling stones, why I must parry them, must I not?"

"I am not mistaken," she returned, rather sulkily. "Richard only wrote to me yesterday, and said he hoped you'd be happy, but the Boughton estates were mortgaged, and the second son wouldn't get anything."

"It was exceedingly kind of your brother Richard to forward this information for my ex-

press behoof and benefit," I put in, sarcastically. "Pray thank him for me when you answer his letter. My father will take ample care that I do not marry a swindler or a blackleg."

"You needn't be so cross about it," she said, peevishly. "I was only telling you for your own good. I know if I were going to marry a man I should be very grateful to any one who found out whether he had any money or not. I don't like buying a pig in a poke, and men are so deceitful. They pretend one thing and mean another, and then when it's too late you find them out. I only hope you'll always find your *fiancé* everything you believe him to be. I shall always consider he behaved atrociously to me," energetically, rocking herself backwards and forwards.

"Do you mean here, or in Devonshire?" I queried, rather cruelly, but what can one do with a girl like Leila?

"I mean both. He led me on—he can't deny it," and her mouth drew down at the corners, as if she intended to indulge in briny sorrow.

"But he does deny it," I asserted, forcibly.

"Of course he does to you. Well, I bear you no malice, Celia, remember that," she answered, blinking her eyes, for the tears remained unshed. "No, I bear neither of you malice, don't think it."

I glanced sharply up at her from my work. She spoke fair enough, but if ever a malicious gleam shone over any face it shone from hers, and I catch it in the second I look up, before it vanishes.

I wish she was gone. I feel as if she meant to do us some harm. A vague, uncomfortable prescence, and yet I may do her great injustice. How is it that when we are children we always taste our powders even under the seductive mask of raspberry jam? I know I invariably discovered the cheat, and turned mutinous. Later years only make us children of a larger growth, and our senses keener even than in childhood.

This morning I had my first love-letter from Colin—the first love-letter I have ever had in all my life, written in such a little, scrawly hand too. I have already read it so many times that I almost know it off by heart, and in another few times of perusal I shall doubtless be able to recite it word for word. What an ineffable little silly I am! Talk of a green goading! It is nothing to me. Well, Colin tells me nothing of Daryl, only says he has no cheering news for me, which does not sound encouraging, and adds that he shall run down to Marling on the following Friday, which will have made him absent eight whole days.

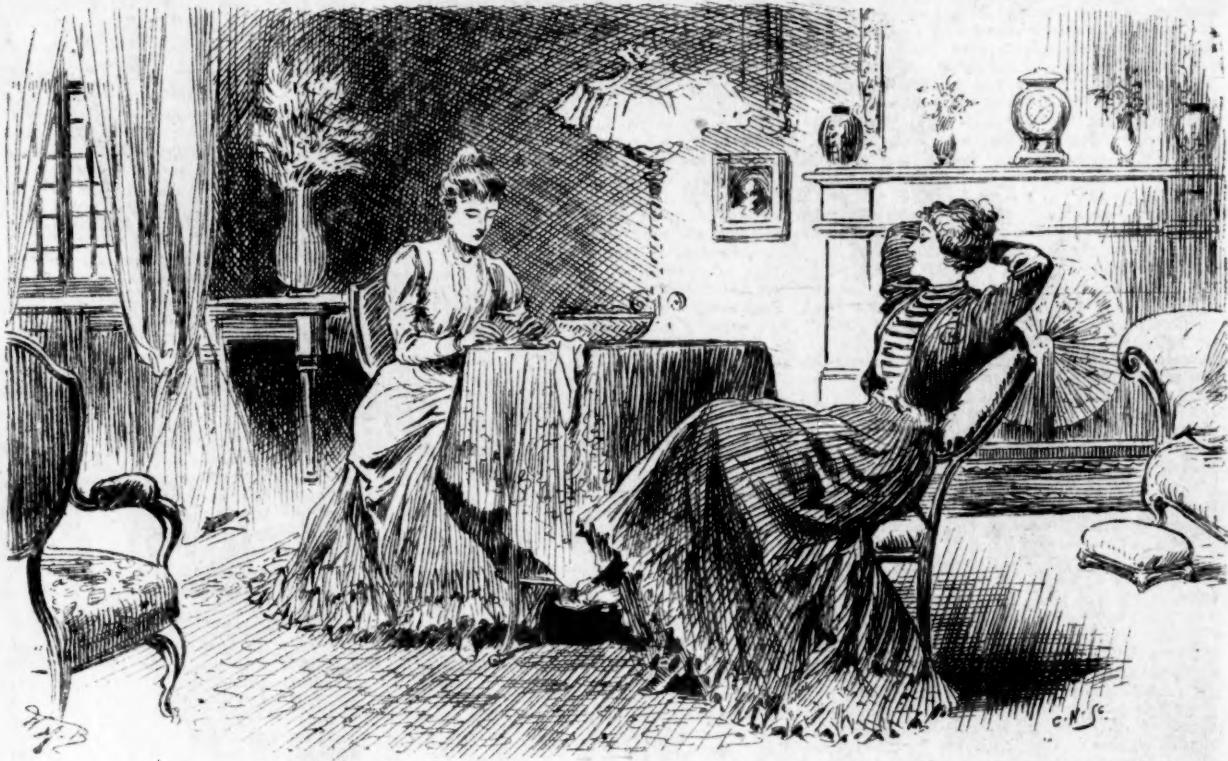
I mentioned this intention to the assembled family circle at luncheon, and father immediately said he thought it would be much pleasanter for him to come back to Gable End, and remain with us until he left Marling for good.

The idea charmed me, and I knew Colin would much prefer being here than at the Rectory, where, as he said, he considered he had stayed too long already, though neither Miss Hannah nor Mr. Barlow allowed it to be the case. Miss Hannah had so taken us under her wing that I believe she would have liked to keep Colin at the Rectory until we were married and done for.

When I heard father's proposal I fully anticipated some soft, purring dissent, carefully sugared and sweetened to taste from Aunt. Some vague excuse, or regret, that just at that particular time it would be impossible to receive another visitor at Gable End, which but for that tiresome something would have been the one thing delightful to her above the others.

Strange to say, for once my mental acumen played me false. Aunt agreed to it with the sweetest amiability possible. There was not a flaw in tone, look, manner, as she inquired in her best voice which room her "sweet niece" thought Mr. Boughton would like. Leila, too, clapped her hands playfully at me, and said, airily, what a lucky girl I was to have such a dear papa, and how nice it would be to have him all day long, meaning, of course, Colin. So it became an accomplished proposal, and I wrote to my lover that same afternoon, that he might get it at once.

Then I sallied forth to post it in the village.



"WELL, COLIN BOUGHTON HAS HAD HIS FLING MOST CERTAINLY!" SAID LELLA, TILTING HER CHAIR TO AND FRO.

and go on to the Rectory to acquaint Miss Hannah of our project, and talk about Colin.

To her alone did I indulge in what Lella called "lovers' rhapsodies." She was my escape valve, and, indeed, she must often have wearied of the endless round of what he said, did, and what a darling he was. To me, however, it was the intensest interest and delight.

When I got back I arrived to find father chasing the last Brahma hen out of the flower-garden. Four of them had by some mischance got loose, and wandered straightway to the most delectable spot they could find, namely, our flower-beds—father's pride and glory. Here they soon made awful havoc, a scratched ruin waste, and here by accident father happened to see them from his library window.

Heedless of hat or any kind of head covering, and thinking only of those devastating hens, and the murder of his lovely flowers, ruined for that summer, he rushed out into the broiling afternoon sun, just then blazing away with all its hottest splendour. I found him over-flushed, heated, panting, but victorious. The last Brahma hen had fled precipitately, pursued by Peter, who came in at the death.

But the unusual exertion proved too much. He complained towards the evening of violent headache and pain in his limbs, adding that he feared the sun had given him a slight stroke as he felt it at the back of his neck so much.

Aunt fussed about him, and concocted some kind of febrifuge, she calls it, for him to drink, but as yet it does not seem to have done him any good.

Another day gone. One less before my Colin comes. Dear soul! How I do long to have him back. Father is no better, and the house very quiet. Michael, too, has departed for twenty-four hours to London, so aunt informed me, but she did not add the reason.

"It is nothing but a little business matter of my own," she ended. "I did not think it necessary to worry your father about it, especially as he is so unwell."

I confess, however, to being a little startled at suddenly meeting Michael arrayed in his Sunday best, not the usual work-a-day country garb, emerging from aunt's room as I was on my way downstairs to breakfast, and stopping me with a—

"I'll say good-bye, Celia. I'm just off. The dog-cart is at the door."

"Off!" I echoed, surveying the unusual spectacle of Michael in broadcloth and top hat on a weekday morning. "Off! Where to! Where are you going?"

"I'm obliged to go up to London for mother," he returned, in his harsh, uneven voice, brushing the nap of his hat. "I shan't be away long, only until to-morrow morning. I want to catch the early train."

"Oh!" I rejoined, still looking at him, and aunt came to the door.

"Michael is going up for me, my precious. A little matter of business, that is all. He must make himself useful to his mother sometimes," playfully. "Come, Michael, you will lose your train. Say good-bye to Celia, though it is not for long. He will be back to-morrow. Have you said good-bye to Lella yet? You must not forget her. She is downstairs, waiting to see you off."

We all descended, found Lella at the hall door, and the dog-cart ready.

As he drove off, Lella suddenly burst out into a long, low peal of laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked, wondering at this sudden display of mirth.

I myself could not see anything so remarkably funny in a man driving away from a hall door. I might be obtuse, no doubt, still I couldn't see it in the same light that Lella evidently viewed it.

"My thoughts," she answered, abruptly, ceasing her hilarity as quickly as she began it.

"Were they so very funny, then?" I remarked, rather sarcastically, for Lella looked at me as if I was in some way connected with her mirth, and

no one, mind you, likes being a butt. I don't pretend that it is agreeable.

"They were more than funny, they were simply excruciatingly delicious," she rejoined, and I fancied there was a slight touch of insolence in her tone. "I have the oddest thoughts sometimes, they come and go in a moment, they amuse me infinitely, more than I can express."

"So it seems," I put in quickly. "There is, I know, a certain class of humanity who always laugh at their own wit. You evidently belong to that class."

"What a sharp tongue you have when you like, Celia!" she said presently, more contemplatively than ill-humouredly. "So I am a fool, am I? Fools laugh at their own jokes, consequently I am a genus fool. Well, I may be one, as you intimate. Time will show whether I deserve your encomium or no. I may ask you some day whether you still think so, or have altered your candid opinion. But you know," suddenly turning upon me, "those laugh who win."

Then she indulged in another low peal of laughter.

I marched silently into the dining-room for breakfast, where aunt was already waiting for us. As she followed behind me I heard her saying softly, in a stage whisper,—

"Those laugh who win, you know, Celia."

(To be continued.)

In most parts of Sweden enormous quantities of blanched and bleached mosses are found that grew ages ago. These old mosses are now gathered and made into paper, which is found to be very fine in quality. A manufacture of paper from this material has begun operations near Jönköping, and is turning out paper in all degrees of excellence, from tissue to sheets three-quarters of an inch in thickness. These latter are as hard as wood.



"GOOD-BYE!" SAID DUDLEY, REGRETFULLY; THEN TURNING, SIBEL FLED TO THE HOUSE WITH THE SPEED OF A LAPWING.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

—:—

CHAPTER VII.

THE SWEETNESS OF FIRST LOVE.

"My poor little Belle—my little sister!"

Dudley Wentworth was slowly recovering his head, which he had lost through compassion, and awoke to a consciousness that he was on the brink of doing that for which he had declared that a man ought to be horsewhipped.

The girl, quivering with sudden shyness, drew herself away from him.

"I must go," she said, timidly, putting her hat straight.

"Yes; but where?" looking thoughtfully over the bare, brown fields. "The Chase is not a pleasant place for anyone at present."

"To London, I think. I was going to stay there till I could get a place as companion."

"What a child you are!" his eyes softening with wonderful tenderness. "Fancy you in London, wearing out people's doorsteps with a piteous petition to be taken in! Do the Forsters know that you have left them?"

"Not yet; I got out of the window," blushing vividly.

He raised his eyebrows in evident disapprobation.

"Would it be possible to get back again without any fuss?"

"Do you think I must?"

"I do; at least, for the present."

As he spoke he was already maturing a plan for her welfare; but it was not time to broach it.

"You don't know what it will be to me to go back;" in a low voice of suppressed emotion. "I would rather, so much rather, go to London."

"Impossible! The seven o'clock train has gone, even if it weren't madness to think of it. Just for a few days bear it, to please me," with his most winsome smile.

She turned her face homewards resignedly. Death itself she would have been willing to face if his voice had led her on—how much more a few days of *ennui*!

"Tell me, why did you do it?" he asked, looking down earnestly into her upturned face, as they stood at the gate of Coombe Lodge.

She turned away.

"I can't."

"My little one, won't you let me help you?" She shook her head.

"It may be years before we meet again."

She started convulsively, and looked up at him with scared eyes.

"I have exchanged into the 13th Hussars in India, and the regiment is going into active service at once, so that I may have to go in the next trophsy. I shouldn't like to start feeling quite in the dark about you. What has the General done to you—at least you can tell me that?"

"He has doubted my word," drawing herself up proudly, "and told me I am not fit to be with his daughters! He has shut me up in my room, and told me I am to be a prisoner till he can send me away. He says—Oh! I can't tell you!" the tears running down her cheeks as she recounted his wrongs.

Thoroughly puzzled, he raised her hands to his lips, and kissed them, his heart overflowing with sympathy.

"Is he mad? Shall I go in and speak to him?"

"No; you will only make it worse."

"What was it all about?"

"That I can't tell you. Don't ask me!"

"I must wait till you choose to trust me," very gravely.

"You won't let me help you, though nothing would please me better."

"You are so kind," stifling a sob. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye. I suppose if I called I should see you!"

"No, not a chance."

"Then it is a real good-bye—a long good-

bye! It is quite possible that I may get knocked over by a bullet. Think of it, Sibel, I say it seriously. We may never meet again."

The girl shook like the leaves of a willow in the wind.

"I ask for no promise—I bind you to nothing; only there is no other girl whom I'm half so sorry to leave, and yours will be the first face that I shall look for when I come back."

She was sobbing now, almost without restraint.

"Still you won't trust me!" in a voice full of pain. "You can't care for me in the least."

Shame tied her tongue. How could she tell him that, under any circumstances whatever, she had met Major Lushington in secret—at midnight—in the moonlight. If she had only told all, she might have been spared a burden of misery; but afraid to risk it, she, who was usually so fond of talking, held her tongue.

"Then there is no more to be said!" releasing her hands. "I was a fool to think you did."

She clasped them together in great agitation; then thinking that she would lose him for ever, she laid one of them in desperation on his sleeve. "Dudley, I do care!" scarcely above a whisper.

A ray of joy passed over the face which a moment before had looked so stern.

"Then, keep your secret, dear, if you like. I am your only friend—your brother, always ready to do anything for you when you will let me. I mustn't keep you—Belle, don't forget me!"

looking longingly into the face which he hoped one day to make his own; and the next moment, in spite of all his resolutions, he whispered, softly, "Give a kiss to your brother!" and stole it, his soft moustaches resting lovingly on the fresh pure lips. At least, though he could not claim her, she should go into the world with the seal of his love. It would do no harm to the innocent girl.

There was not a wrong—not a single dis-honourable thought in his heart towards her. If

fortune were kind to him, and she were faithful, he might come back one day, and ask her to be a soldier's wife ; and if, on the other hand, she grew to like another better, it would show that his kiss had left no sting behind.

"Good-bye!" he murmured regretfully. As for one instant he drew her close to his heart, there she rested with a sigh of joy and pain ; then raising her head quickly, fled with the speed of a lapwing through the gate, and up the carriage-drive.

Wentworth fastened the gate, which had swung too far, then walked up the road, his thoughts so absorbing that he did not notice that he passed anyone on the way. Priscilla, the head housemaid, had heard the latch of the gate, and a flying footstep on the drive, and thinking to surprise Mary, the under-housemaid, in a flirtation with the groom at the Chase, who was supposed to look on her rosy face with a favourable eye, was much taken aback to find not the servant, but his master.

Whom had he been after ? Not Miss Judith, certainly, who had long ago sat down with the rest of the family to dinner. Could it be that artful busy, Miss Fitzgerald ? As the idea darted through her mind, she quickened her pace to a run, heard a flop on the path, and the next moment tumbled over a ladder which was lying flat on the ground, and bruised her shins. She scrambled to her feet, and after anathematising the gardener's carelessness, limped round the corner to the back-door, too much occupied with her pains and bruises to think of anything else. But when she had imparted her small bit of news to her confidant, the cook, and they had both shaken their heads over the mysterious fact that Mr. Wentworth, one of the proudest men in the county, had been seen loitering at the gate at a time of night when any right-minded gentleman ought to have been sitting at his dinner, and that somebody had run away from him into the gardens of Combe Lodge, she got up from her chair, and said, with a knowing look out of the corner of her eye,—

"I've quite forgot Miss Fitzgerald's dinner-things, and whilst I'm a-fetching of them, I'll take a look round !"

But when she had fetched the key, and unlocked the prisoner's door, she found nothing to confirm her suspicions.

Sibel was lying on the sofa, looking dreamily into the fire, and apparently as innocent as herself of any communications with a lover outside. The window was fastened, the curtains drawn, and neither hat nor cloak was to be seen upon the bed ; and yet Priscilla felt an intuitive conviction that there was something wrong behind the scene, and determined that Miss Judith should know all the facts of the case.

The hard, cold woman had borne a grudge against Sibel ever since her first entry into the house. She pretended to think it unjust that another inmate should be added to the household without an increase to her wages, and any services she had to render to Miss Fitzgerald were performed unwillingly, and against the grain. She was the only one of the servants who had not sympathised with her in her disgrace.

Foster, the gardener, whose little boy she taught in the Sunday-school, was devoted to her. Mary, the under-housemaid, had been ready to cry over her misfortunes. The cook thought it her duty to seem neutral, although she said in a significant way to Pierce, the butler, "She had no liking for them stuck-up natures, which never got into no mischief for a bit of fun."

To which the butler replied, with a solemn shake of his head, "There's always a plenty of mischief amongst the patriciates, only some of 'em take precious good care not to be found out."

Rose came to the door and whispered a tearful "good night," then went miserably off to bed.

Sibel blessed her for her affection, but felt as if she deserved no pity. Dudley Wentworth had told her that he loved her, and her heart was singing a psalm of joy.

She was quite content to leave her late in his hands. He had promised to think for her, so that she might let her puzzled brain rest. What mattered it if her narrow-minded uncle chose to

disapprove of her ? Dudley had an infinitely higher standard than any of them, and yet had thought her worthy of his interest. She had not told him, but what did it signify ? She had done no wrong, only committed a childish folly ; and so she hugged herself into a false security, forgetting that in this world folly is apt to pay a heavier price than sin.

The fire died out, the house grew very silent ; it was time to go to bed.

So ended the first day of captivity, and a gleam of light had already appeared beyond the storm-clouds.

The next day her door was left unlocked, and she was informed that she might consider the school-room as her sitting-room.

Mrs. Forrester, looking pale and worried, came to see her just before luncheon. She did not sit down, but leaned against the back of a chair as if glad of support.

Sibel rose from her seat but said nothing, feeling an inward pity for her aunt, whose gentle nature often strove valiantly against her husband's harshness.

"Only one word. I can't stay to discuss anything with you," she began tremulously. "Just tell me if you wrote that dreadful letter !"

"No, aunt, I never wrote it !"

"Let me see, there's something else I want to say," putting her hand to her head, which always ached with the slightest agitation. "If you didn't, why did you go and meet that horrid man ?"

"I did not go and meet him," drawing herself up proudly. "If I had known that he was there, nothing would have induced me to go."

"My dear child, tell me who did write that letter ?"

"I can't. I promised not to," turning away.

"But it could do no harm to tell me, and nothing else will convince your uncle."

"Then nothing will. He doubts my word, and I no longer care what he thinks of me !"

Mrs. Forrester looked into the pale, indignant face, and sighed.

"Then there is no use in my staying"—she paused, afraid of expressing the pity she felt. The girl looked so white—if she fell ill she would never forgive herself. Drawing her arm over her shoulders, she walked slowly to the door.

"Your uncle wishes you to have regular exercise."

"Like the prisoners at Newgate," with a scornful curl of her lip. In her fiery independence she had small sympathy with those who felt the right, and lacked the courage to do it.

"I don't know about them," with a pained gentleness that filled the wayward heart with compassion ; "but you can have your pony for two hours every day."

"I have no wish to go out," she said, quietly.

"But you will be ill," piteously.

"If I am, I shall be the sooner off your hands."

With this pitiless remark the conversation closed, and Mrs. Forrester went downstairs wiping her eyes as she sighed, feeling that the good she had done was small.

"That was brutal of me," said Sibel, in passionate self-reproach, addressing her remark to the fire. "Aunt is so weak that uncle twists her round his fingers, but she means well, poor thing, and might have been quite nice if she had had a man, not a monster, for her husband. I wish I hadn't hurt her !"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PEER TO THE RESCUE.

JUDITH'S mind was full of vague suppositions concerning her cousin, for which she was at a loss to account when questioned by Rose.

Priscilla had mentioned to Miss Wood, the maid, and Miss Wood had casually let out to her mistress, the mysterious circumstances about Mr. Wentworth at the gate, and the flying feet in the carriage-drive ; and although it never occurred to her that Sibel could have descended from her window by a ladder, she had an uneasy conviction that Dudley Wentworth was there on her account.

To do her justice, she was really scandalised by her cousin's supposed conduct, and decided that the only way to bring her to a sense of proper shame was by relegating her to Coventry. Phil returned at the end of a week, full of his doings at Woolwich, and asked for Sibel in as unconcerned a manner as he could manage.

"Don't talk of her," said Judith, with sad gravity.

"Gone mad, or eloped ?" with his hands in his pockets.

"Hush ! don't joke about it. You know what papa found out just before she went !"

"Yes ! Anything fresh ?" his eyes looking unusually eager.

"Nothing. She is as obstinate as ever, and won't confess."

"Perhaps she has nothing to confess."

"That's right, Phil," exclaimed Rose, quickly. "It is such an awful shame to condemn her, when she might be in the right all the time."

"I should think it was. Lushington's in an awful wax."

"You didn't tell him ?" from both their voices, rising almost to a scream.

"Of course I did. He proposed to write to the governor ; but I told him it was no manner of use ; he might just as well put his letter into the fire. However, he is going to put it into the hands of someone else."

"And our disgrace will be known to the county ! " Judith rose from her seat in a state of excitement. "Fancy, if it gets to Dudley Wentworth's ears !"

"Of course it will. He's Lushington's particular chum. I shouldn't wonder if he came marching down here with his nose in the air, to give us a lecture all round. He won't stand her being kept a prisoner, I can tell you that," enjoining the confusion he had created.

"Phil, you are enough to drive one mad. What possessed you to blab it out to the first person you came across ?"

"Because the first person, as you call him, happened to be most particularly concerned in it, or rather in her. There'll be no end of a row if this goes on. Sibel isn't a nobody to be put upon like a common dependent, and Guy may be coming home any day. I should like to know if any one of you would dare to look him in the face."

"Sibel wouldn't, for one," with a malicious smile.

"I guess she would. She's not the first pretty girl who met her lover by moonlight." He went out of the room, and upstairs, walking straight into the school-room, as if it were a matter of course.

Sibel was reading by the firelight, but she looked up eagerly, as he came in. "Well ?"

"Here's a letter for you, from Lushington."

She took it from his hand, looking at it doubtfully, as if she had half a mind not to open it. "What does he write to me for ?"

"Better read it and see. A friend is not to be despised," playing with the china ornaments on the mantelpiece.

"No, indeed," with a sigh, turning the square envelope round, examining the bold handwriting, and attempting to decipher the red and gold monogram. She felt a wonderful disinclination to open it, but the aggravating boy evidently would not talk till she had. Then she tore the envelope right across, and pulled out the letter. Her colour rose as she read it :

"Royal Artillery Barracks, Woolwich,

"DEAREST MISS FITZGERALD,—

"What can I do for you ? My whole life is at your service. Say the word, and I'll come to you at once. Would it be any good if I told that uncle of yours that it was entirely my own fault from beginning to end ? I should like to punch his head !

"One line by return of post. (Phil has engaged to post it) to—Yours devotedly,

"HAROLD LUSHINGTON."

"Entirely his fault, he says, when it was yours," looking up into her cousin's face with puzzled eyes.

"I know, but he won't believe it. He swears that you knew he was coming, or you never would have gone to the Knoll at that time of night."

"Phil, I trusted you!" with indignant scorn, as she tore the letter to pieces, and flung them into the fire.

"I did my best," sullenly.

"If you had, he would have believed you. I declare you deserve that I should run straight down to my uncle, and tell him exactly what you have done."

"Do, if you like. I'll be hanged if I wouldn't like it. Lushington says I'm sure to have my commission directly, and of course the governor would make me give it up; but still, anything is better than hating myself as I do now. I know I'm not fit to look you in the face," and with a great gulp, "you despise me."

"One lie more or less is nothing to a Forrester."

"Is that your opinion of me?" stung to the quick. "Very well, then, I can't stand it any longer. Look here, Belle, I am not quite such a mean fellow as you fancy. You think it's nothing to me to come home and find you moping up here by yourself, and treated no better than a dog, but I tell you it cuts me up awfully. I can't stand it. I shall go to the governor this instant and tell him the truth. He may kick me out of the house if he likes, but at least I shan't be ashamed of myself when I get there." He moved towards the door, but she flung her arms round him and stopped him.

"Now don't be a goose, Phil," half crying. "I wanted you to be sorry, that's all."

"But it's not enough," trying to push her away.

"Yes, it will quite do. I wouldn't have you spoil your life for anything."

"But you'll be ashamed of me," his under-lip trembling.

"No, I won't. You wanted to do your duty, but I wouldn't let you; and, after all, what good would it do? It would make you all still more miserable, and I should never forgive your father, and nothing could make me stay here."

"You will bring it up against me for the rest of your life!"

"Not I. I wouldn't be so mean. Oh, Phil! I could love you better than any of them if you would always be a man and stick to what you said."

"And when I try you won't let me."

"But I like you to try," putting her head caressingly on the boy's shoulder.

"Belle, you are a brick," looking with real affection into her weary face. "I shall go to the dogs without you."

"No, you must do your best, and some day," it seemed even to her hopeful disposition very far off. "I shall be proud of you."

"Yes," his lip curling in self-contempt, "proud of the cur who let a woman bear the blame."

She lifted up her face and kissed him. "You have nothing to do with the past. Be a good boy for the future."

There was a long pause; the boy's heart was working with nobler emotions than he had ever had before—a girl's self-sacrifice made him resolve to be unselfish—a girl's courage made him determine to be brave. He looked back on his past life with eyes from which the scales had fallen. His shifty evasions no longer made him proud of his own cleverness, and never again would he be so ready to boast that he had escaped with a whole skin out of a scrape, whilst others were scratched or wounded.

"Now go. I quite forgot you ought not to be here."

"Rot!"

"Judith avoids me like a pariah, and poor Little Rose is obliged to do the same."

"Then I'll stick to you like glue. Wherever you are I shall come to you, and if they lock you up I shall get in at the window."

She shook her head.

"Your father will be angry."

"Never mind. There's no end to the things that I ought to do for you. I say, write your letter, and I'll post it to-night."

"There is no answer."

"No answer! Deuced hard on Lushington. He'll be awfully done."

"Your father shall never be able to say that I entered into a clandestine correspondence with him. You can tell him that I am much obliged to him, but he can do me no good whatever."

"He would like it ten thousand times better if you wrote it yourself."

"Then he won't get it. Go, there's a good fellow! I really want you to go."

"Depend upon it, he will write to Wentworth."

She started and turned pale.

"For Heaven's sake, no! I would rather die than he should know it!"

"Humph! I'm afraid your end must be near."

"Philip!" came a stentorian voice from the bottom of the stairs.

"By Jove! there's the governor! Ta, ta, keep up your spirits."

"Philip!" in a still louder tone.

"Oh, hang it, he needn't be in such a confounded hurry! Got plenty of books?"

"Yes, yes; go on!"

He left the room with an air of independence, but looked tolerably sheepish when he found his father waiting for him in the hall. There was something in General Forrester's eye which always took the courage out of him, as if by a magnetic spell.

"I thought you knew that it was my express order that no one should hold any communication whatever with your cousin!"

"There was no harm in talking to her a bit," with sullen defiance.

"I say there is harm, and I'll trouble you not to contradict me. I have had the most extraordinary letter from Wentworth. I don't know if it is you who have been spreading the family disgrace abroad!" with a sharp look at his son's face.

"I haven't seen him since the blow-up."

"Nor written to him?" his two eyes more like gimlets than ever.

"Certainly not! I never did in all my life!"

"Humph! It's very strange. I don't know what to think of it. How on earth it came to his ears I can't think—unless the girl wrote to him herself!"

"I'd take my oath she hasn't!" he said, with conviction, thankful to get a chance of standing up for her, without inculpating himself.

"Then who has? Your mother can't make it out, nor can I."

The General turned off into the library, and Phil, shrugging his shoulders, opened the drawing-room door.

Mrs. Forrester was lying on the sofa, Rose sitting on the fender-stool close to her feet, Judith standing by the table, with a crimson patch on either cheek. She turned round as her brother came in.

"Did you ever hear anything like it in all your life?"

"What's up?" looking from one to the other with lively curiosity.

"Lord Wentworth wants to know if we will kindly allow Miss Fitzgerald to live with him as a daughter"—with a vicious emphasis on the word—"during the absence of his son! Hugh will be at Oxford, and he dreads the loneliness."

"Hurrah!" throwing a paper-knife up into the air, and catching it. "I knew that Wentworth would not allow her to be set upon. What on earth do you look so glum for?"

"You've no sense at all," she said, impatiently. "You can't see what a disgrace all this is to the family."

"A disgrace to be the adopted daughter of a peer? No, I don't see that at all."

"She won't be that. They only ask her out of charity."

"Charity begins at home. They want her, and I'm precious glad to hear it."

"But it is hard on Judith," said Mrs. Forrester, gently. "She feels that it is her place to be with the poor old man, and it is not pleasant to be passed over."

"If Judy has been setting her cap at Dudley

I could have told her that it was waste of trouble," with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"She didn't!" exclaimed Rose, indignantly.

"Then why is she making such a kick-up?"

"Sibyl is a nasty, sly, intriguing thing!" and Judith wiped her eyes.

"Stop there!" cried Phil, his cheeks glowing.

"She wouldn't do mean things to save her life.

She can't help being the prettiest little thing in the county, and you are all green with jealousy. Wentworth has the same to appreciate her, and you don't like it; but, Judy, my dear, you had better give it up, it's quite hopeless."

Judith drew herself up in speechless indignation; but at that moment the General put his head in at the door, and looking at his son, said gravely,—

"Mind, not a word of this to your cousin. I shall inform her myself of the proposal when I have had time to consider it. Hadn't you better go to bed," turning to his wife, who looked tired out.

"Tell me first what you have decided to do. I suppose it will be the best thing for the poor girl!"

"I can't say I think so. It is a great deal more than she deserves."

"Oh, papa, don't let her go to them," said Judith, imploringly.

"I can't offend Wentworth, and it will save me some embarrassment," veering round again through natural perversity.

"It is the best thing that could have happened," said Phil, with new courage.

"Your opinion was not asked," said his father severely, as he shut the door.

CHAPTER IX.

WILL YOU HAVE ME—"YES" OR "NO"?

The monotonous days passed wearily, one so much like the other that if it had not been for Sunday Sibyl Fitzgerald would have almost lost the count of time.

Wentworth Church was just inside the precincts of the Chase, a stone building with an ivied tower, and a picturesque churchyard, where the white crosses in summer-time gleamed through a wealth of roses.

Sibyl went to church by herself, feeling lonely and sad to the last degree. The villagers passed her by in twos and threes; she seemed to be the only one who had nobody to bear her company. Her cheeks gained a sudden accession of colour, and she forgot her depression as a well-known figure in Sunday frock-coat and tall hat came striding down the narrow pathway which was the nearest way to the house.

They met at the porch—she trembling all over with secret joy; he, cold, calm, and reserved, as if offended past forgiveness.

He took off his hat, and his stern mouth never relaxed into a smile. Then he stepped aside for her to pass first, without one word of the commonest form of greeting; and the poor girl, dazed by the sudden blow, stumbled forward into the darkened church, feeling like a favourite hound that had been kicked by a beloved master.

She slipped into a quiet corner, and tried to say her prayers, but her thoughts wandered continually to the man who had stolen her kisses and won her love only to cast her off in the time of trouble. She had expected so little—only a smile, and a shake of the hands—and she had got nothing more than what he must have given to the merest stranger. Too indignant to cry, she stood up during the psalms with such a white, defiant face, that it disturbed the peace of those who chanced to look that way; and Dudley Wentworth, though he never seemed to glance in that direction, saw nothing else, even when his eyes were fixed on his Prayer-book.

"So young, so fair, so false," he said to himself, as he took up his hat as soon as the service was over, and walked out of church, without waiting to speak to anyone—a proceeding which disconcerted General Forrester, who had counted upon catching him, and giving him his answer in person.

Another day had gone, and the poor little

outcast, having finished her solitary dinner, and sent away the tray, was trying to cheer herself up by writing to her brother—not that she meant to tell him all that had happened, for she felt that such news would be enough to bring him straight back from India, and the consequences to his prospects might be fatal. In her utter unselfishness she would rather suffer alone, though she was always ready to share the sorrows of others. It was owing to this, as well as to her beauty, that she gained a friend wherever she went. Her gullible nature shone out of her eyes, and her smile was enough "to wile the baby from its mother's breast."

Yet now, in the day of sorrow, all men had deserted her, and she was alone. She sighed, and in answer to the sigh a handful of gravel was thrown up at the window. She started, dropped her pen, then telling herself it was only Phil, picked it up again, and put it in the inkstand. The signal was repeated. Smiling at his impatience, she rose from her seat, drew back the curtains, and threw up the sash. The next moment a dark figure, which had been perched on the sill, jumped into the room, and to her horror and dismay she saw—not Phil, but Major Lushington! Whilst she stood petrified with surprise, the artilleryman had all his wits about him. He shut the window, drew the curtains, crossed the room, and locked the door; then he turned to her, his dark eyes gleaming.

"You would not send me an answer, so I was obliged to fetch it in person. What can I do for you?" holding out his hands.

She put her own behind her back, and looked up at him indignantly, "Nothing, only leave me at once!"

"Hardly!" with a little laugh, "after running all sorts of risks to get this chance. Phil is waiting outside on guard, and I am acting under Wentworth's advice. Will that satisfy you?"

She started, and turned as white as her dress. "Did Mr. Wentworth send you?" speaking very slowly.

"Yes; that is to say, he thought I had better come. I could only get a few hours' leave—so walked down directly dinner was over. Now, haven't you a word to say to me?"

She let him lead her to the sofa, feeling as if she were in a dream.

"My poor little thing," bending over her fondly. "I have been so sorry for you. And to think it was for my sake you got into the scrape!"

"Through Phil and no one else, Major Lushington," looking up into his pale, determined face, with earnest eyes which seemed insensible to its beauty. "If you were found here you would compromise me fatally."

"I have done it already," his voice sinking almost to a whisper. "I would have given anything to prevent it. It was not entirely my fault—you must own that."

"But no one need know anything about it."

"It is known, Sibyl, there is only one way out of the scrape," stooping still lower, till his breath fanned the curls on her forehead. "Say that you will marry me, and the world will forget all about it."

She looked up at him with frightened eyes. "Oh, no! I can't!"

"Is it such a dreadful fate?" stretching his arm behind her along the back of the sofa. "You didn't seem to hate me at Woolwich!"

"Do you think I would let any man take me out of pity!" her cheeks flaming—her eyes blazing through angry tears.

"Not out of pity, darling! When Wentworth said it was the only thing I could do, my heart jumped at it. I never was so pleased in my life."

"What did he say of me?"—her tone like a wall.

"Of you?" hesitating. "You know he is a man who ought to have been born in another century. A woman to please him must be nothing less than an angel. He really carries it too far."

A shiver passed through her, as she thought of their parting at the gate, when the fair proud face had softened, and his eyes spoke the love

which his lips scarcely dared to utter. Was it a dream!

"You haven't answered me, and there's no time to lose. Will you have me, 'yes' or 'no'? Darling, I will do my best to make you happy."

"He wished it!" in a low voice, still harping on that discordant string.

"I don't know about wishing it," some irritation in his voice, "for he spoke of it as no concern of his, but he said it was the only way."

"And all because I met you by accident at the Wishing Well! It seems such a small thing to make such a fuss about."

"A small thing!" an amused smile curling the tips of his moustaches. "Such accidents as those are deliciously dangerous."

Something in the words repelled her, and she got up and stood by the fireplace. Her fate was in her hands, to do with as she liked—another minute, and it might have passed from her to his. No wonder that her brain was in a whirl, and she scarcely knew what she did or said.

Harold Lushington had perfect reliance in his own powers of fascination, although a glimmering of the truth respecting Wentworth had flashed into his mind. How many hearts had he broken on his wayward way through life! Their number was forgotten on earth, but perhaps it was known in Heaven. This child could not escape him. The harder she was to win the more determined he was to have her; not that matrimony was tempting to him. No! he was in no hurry to be enslaved by a wedded-ring, but she must be pledged to him before he left that night; he must have the right to hold her in his arms, and taste the sweetness of her dainty lips.

He came behind her, and his arm stole softly round the supple waist. He saw her bosom heaving as her heart throbbed tumultuously, but he had read the passion beats of love too often to be dismayed. "Sibyl," he said, in a whisper as soft as a mother's to her babe, "you must love me! Darling, is it so hard?"

She turned round and looked at him with mournful despairing eyes. "Is it for my sake, or yours?"

"For mine, dearest! I cannot live without you."

Still she strove against her fate. "You told me you liked to be free!"

"Yes, free to love anyone, just as I choose. If I had been married, where should I have been now? only able to do you harm instead of good. Only able to offer you a love from which perhaps you'd have shrunk."

"And now—now—" twisting her fingers together as if in pain.

"And now—you have no choice," his chest heaving. "You must let me take you, and make you my own, like this, dearest."

He clasped his arms round her, and kissed her with all the passion of his nature.

She shuddered from head to foot.

At that moment there was an imperative knock at the door. They both started convulsively. "Oh, go—go," she panted.

"Not till I have your promise," his eyes glowing like a flame. His passion once roused, fear of death would not have made him go till she had yielded.

An impatient hand rattled the handle of the door, and the General called out, "Sibyl, what are you about? Let me in at once!"

"Promise!" whispered the Major, still holding her tight.

"I promise," she said, faintly, and snatching another kiss, he sped on tip-toe to the window. Sibyl was already at the door, when he threw up the sash, and saw with dismay that the ladder had gone. She turned the key, for her uncle was storming outside to such an extent that she did not dare to wait another minute, and the only thing he could do was to wrap the curtains closely round him, and hope to escape observation.

The General came in purple with rage.

"What do you mean by locking me out?"

"You locked me in," she said, tremulously, "so surely I had the right to do the same."

"Intolerable impertinence," glaring suspiciously round the room. "You've been up to some mischief I'd lay any money!"

Then for the first time, through catching sight of the toe of a boot, she became aware that Major Lushington was still in the room. Trembling with fright, she pretended that there was something wrong with the lamp, and, instead of turning it up, put it out.

The General anathematized her carelessness, and gave another glance round the room, haunted by the suspicion that she was keeping something from him. The curtains swaying to and fro attracted his attention.

"You've got the window open," glaring at her as if he thought she were cracked.

"Yes, I know; the room was hot. Never mind," placing herself in front of him. "I suppose you have something to say to me."

"I have, but I shall wait till I have shut that window. Get out of the way, girl!"—trying to pass her.

"But, uncle," catching hold of his sleeve in her desperation, "I—I—shall faint if it's shut!"

"Are you in your senses?"—he really began to doubt it. "The wind is in the north-east, and I don't want a chill on the liver if you do."

He put her on one side, and stepped quickly forward—whilst Sibyl held her breath. He pulled back the curtain in his impatient manner, so that every ring rattled, and two came off. She scarcely dared to lift her eyes, her heart beat so that she was almost suffocated; a singing came in her ears, so that she had to cling on to the table to save herself from dropping on the floor. Then as no exclamation came from the General, except a *ugh!* of disgust as the wind blew in his face, she took courage—and saw that there was nothing to be seen but the open sash and a patch of starlit sky.

The Major was gone, and she was saved.

(To be continued.)

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

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CHAPTER VII.

The fourteenth of February, the day fixed for Lord St. Clare's marriage, found him in the library—the room where poor Dora had heard his expressed aversion to her—in close conversation with his solicitor; not the gentleman who had been sent to bear Miss Mace her legacy, but a certain John Grey, a much older man, the senior partner in the firm.

Strangely changed was the handsome Earl—a weight of sorrow and remorse hung over him; and yet there was the restlessness of hope in his dark eyes. Blanche Delaval was still at the Castle, and its master was as much her slave as ever.

"You think then, Grey, Miss Clifford is still alive—though the closest inquiries, and the most skilful search, have failed to find her!"

The solicitor answered without any hesitation.

"My lord, I will stake my life on it that the young lady is living."

"And why?"

"A girl brought up like that, under the care of a lady like Miss Mace, would not be likely to have her head filled with nonsense—half the trifles we read of are produced by a too careful perusal of the daily papers. Now, when I was at Pennington yesterday, I put the question to Miss Mace point-blank—whether Miss Clifford had committed suicide!"

"I confess I don't see how the school mistress could enlighten you."

"She is a sensible woman—she must know a little of the young lady's disposition. She answered me, Lord St. Clare, in these words: 'Dora Clifford may starve, sir; she may work for her bread in any meanly way; but she will never stain her soul with sin.'"

"Poor child!" said Alan, pitifully. "My uncle's will has terribly spoilt both our lives!"

He never recollects that he was to blame for Dora's flight; that, having once asked the girl to

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be his wife, he ought to have bitten his tongue off rather than have spoken slightly of her.

"She must be a rarely generous nature!" said the old lawyer, thoughtfully; "to give up lover, home, and fortune without a word of reproof to her rival!"

"She would never have been happy as Lady St. Clare," said Alan, promptly. "Poor child! she was utterly unfitted for such a rank! I shall never cease my efforts to find her; and, when I know her whereabouts, Grey, you must draw up a deed settling a handsome amount on her."

Mr. Grey stared at his employer.

"Is it possible, my lord, you imagine Miss Clifford's flight leaves you your uncle's heir?"

"Of course it does!" was the prompt reply. "I became heir to everything on condition I married Dora Clifford. I was perfectly willing to perform my share of the contract—she, in a noble generosity, freed me from my sacrifice, and resigned all claims in my favour."

The solicitor paced up and down the room. He felt himself in an awkward position.

"Lord St. Clare," he began, at last; "Miss Clifford's disappearance makes not the slightest difference to the tenor of the late earl's will. By that you succeeded to the property on condition that you married his granddaughter; in any other circumstances the whole went to the young lady and her heirs unreservedly for ever."

Alan looked incredulous.

"If this be so, why was I never told?"

"I don't believe, my lord, the possibility of Miss Clifford refusing your hand was ever hinted at between us; we both took her consent for granted."

"Then I am nothing! It is all exactly the same as if I had refused to marry her!"

"You are Lord St. Clare," corrected the old lawyer, gravely. "But, my lord, everything else is yours only in trust for Miss Clifford. The will appoints you and Captain Fane her guardians."

"It is absurd!" cried Alan, passionately; "the poor girl's words are plain enough—she renounces all claim."

"But even if you could accept such a sacrifice," reproved his companion, "she was powerless to make it. She has but a life-interest in the property; at her death it is secured to her children."

Alan passed his hand across his brow; he had no wish to rob a defenceless, fatherless girl, but he was human. He loved Blanche Delaval as his very soul, and he feared in his secret heart that she would never marry him as a poor man.

"Are you quite sure, Grey? Just think; we may not find Miss Clifford for years; she may—Heaven knows I am not suggesting such a thing as an event to be hoped for—I—she may be dead. Are two grand estates to go unclaimed, two homes uninhabited, for countless years?"

"So long as Miss Clifford is absent, my lord, as her guardian you have a perfect right to the use of Castle St. Clare and the other properties. You might remain in undisturbed possession of them for years, until your children were growing up around you; but even, after such an interval, if Miss Clifford or her heirs appeared, you would have to give up all."

"Then I would rather have nothing to do with it!" declared Alan hotly. "I should feel like a trespasser! When I got up in the morning I should not know whether I had to give up my home before night!"

"Your fate seems hard," said the old man, thoughtfully; "but, oh! my lord, it cannot be so sad as your poor young cousin's."

"Poor!" repeated Alan, scornfully; "do you know what the revenue of the estates is?"

"Were it ten times its amount, a girl who is a lonely friendless wanderer in this wide world is still poor, my lord."

"She will find plenty of friends; with her wealth they will be easy to meet with."

"But unfortunately she does not know of her wealth. She believes her absence will bestow all upon you!"

He went out and Alan was left alone. Coldly as he had spoken of Dora, the young Earl felt strangely anxious about her. An awful fear troubled him, that in her loneliness and despair

she would take the life which seemed so friendless. Her eyes seemed to haunt her cousin; an instinct told him he should never have an easy conscience until he knew the mystery of her fate.

"Oh! Blanche, my darling!" he cried, speaking aloud in his earnestness, "what dreadful calamities our love has brought. And yet, my own, I would not undo that love even if I could!"

"Spoken like my own knight!" said a soft voice near him, and looking up he saw the beautiful form of Blanche Delaval close beside him, those wonderful eyes raised to his as though they would read his very soul. "I have been waiting for you all the morrow!" she said, pointing; "and you have been shut up with that treacherous old lawyer."

"You could not want me more than I longed to come to you, my sweet!"

"Then why didn't you come?"

"I could not refuse Mr. Grey an interview. He has retired from his profession, and only came from his well-earned repose to aid in this search because I could not bear to confide such a matter to a stranger. He went to Pennington yesterday."

"And no doubt he found Miss Clifford teaching little girls their A B C and regretting very much that a fit of temper had robbed her of all chance of becoming Countess St. Clare!"

"Blanche!"

"I do believe you regret her!" said the beauty, reproachfully. "Confess, Alan, the girl has done the most sensible thing she could under the circumstances."

"It is a sad business!"

"Well, has he found her?"

"No."

"Didn't they know where she was at Pennington? Are they hiding her?"

"She is hiding herself, poor child!"

"And this was to have been your wedding-day. Only fancy, Alan, I should have lost you for always!"

In an instant his arms were round her—her head was on his shoulder, and he was taking what kisses he pleased from her full, arched lips.

"You are not sorry!"

"My darling!"

"But you look so grave and stern, Alan. I shall begin to be jealous soon."

"You have no need; my love has never wandered from you, Blanche—never once."

"And you did not really care for her?"

He shook his head.

"I wonder where she is?"

"Don't trouble about her," said Blanche, coaxingly. "I want to talk to you. Do you know that Bee and her husband are going away to-morrow afternoon?"

"And they will take you with them?"

"Yes; but I don't want to stay with them; they are both so horribly cross since Miss Clifford took her departure."

"If you don't like being with them," said Alan, falling at once into the trap, "will you come to me soon, darling? Surely we know each other well enough to dispense with a long engagement! I am lonely and troubled, Blanche; come and fill my life with sunshine. Oh, my beautiful love! how entirely my heart is yours, since I can hardly spare a pang of pity for that poor child who was to have been my wife!"

Blanche pressed her lips to his hand.

"You'll have to tell Bee yourself, Alan; she won't be nice, I am sure."

"Bee is always nice."

"But she was so fond of Dora!"

"And she is so fond of Blanche! My darling, I shall tell Bee you are coming to me at Easter. Will that be too soon, Blanche?"

"No," said the beauty graciously. "I have always thought April the best month for Paris; we can go there for our honeymoon."

A sensitive flush, almost of shame, dyed Alan's face.

"I am afraid we must be less ambitious in our choice. If you marry a poor man, Blanche, trips to Paris will be out of the question."

She laughed.

"You are not poor, Alan. If I had let you be

foolish two months ago and refuse to marry your cousin you might have been, but now it is all right."

Holding her in his arms, one hand toying with her bright-tinted hair, the perfume of her breath fanning his cheek, Alan told his story. He told it as only a true, loyal man could. In words of deep, passionate affection, he assured Blanche she should never feel the want of riches—that love should make her happy in spite of all.

"My sweet!" he said, when he had exhausted all his assurances; "look up and say you believe me, Blanche—tell me it all makes no difference to your promise."

"I cannot!" she said passionately.

"You love me!" he urged; "you have told me so. Blanche, don't let money separate us!"

"We will wait," she began, hesitatingly. "Perhaps, if Miss Clifford does not return—"

"Nothing will make any difference, Blanche; only one thing could restore me to wealth—and it would be wickedness to wish for it."

"What is it?"

"That poor girl's death!"

Silence long and deep—Blanche broke it.

"And if she died?"

"Then I should be rich enough to satisfy even your taste for luxury."

"She did not look very strong," said Blanche, slowly. "Perhaps, if we waited—"

But with those fatal words she destroyed her own power. Blind, infatuated as he was by love of her, Alan Dens could have pardoned her her passion for wealth; but when he heard that implied wish for Dora's death, he started. He was a gentleman, which means he could not have oppressed or injured a lonely, helpless child—as such he regarded his cousin. His eyes were opened like a flash of lightning. He saw how he had been fooled; he knew that from first to last he had been a mere puppet in Miss Delaval's hands! Love! Why she did not know the meaning of the word—it was his wealth she wanted! Very gently he disengaged his hand from hers—very gently he released her from his embrace.

"I thank Heaven!" he cried, sternly, "that I am a poor man; at least it has saved me from the misery of marrying a woman whose heart is as cold and hard as the nether millstone. Miss Delaval, I have the honour to resign all pretensions to your hand."

"Alan!"

"Can you wonder! You have shown me what you are a little too plainly. I could have looked over much through my great love, but—"

"You never loved me, or you would not speak so cruelly!" and tears stood in her eyes.

"Not love you!" and the man's voice almost broke with emotion. "Not love you! Why, my love for you was the strongest passion of my nature; I would have sacrificed everything in the world for you! For you I soiled my honour—for you I neglected my promised wife—for you I broke her heart!"

"She was only a child!"

"But children have hearts—tenderer ones than yours. Oh, Blanche!" and the hard severity of his manner changed to a passionate regret! "why are you so beautiful! Why does Heaven give such faces to women like you—unless it is to blight our lives?"

She never answered him. She stood there at his side, and felt a strange consciousness that her reign was over—her victim had escaped her snare.

Never more could she play fast and loose with Alan's heart—he knew her now in her true colours.

"Well, I'm going to-morrow," she said, at last; "so you won't have to study the problem much longer. I dare say your romantic schoolgirl will turn up before long, and forgive you your temporary infidelity. After all, she will know it is her only chance of being a countess—and even in that class people are a little worldly-wise sometimes, I believe."

Alan's face was black as thunder.

"Abuse me to your heart's content, but, at least, leave her alone."

"Is her name too sacred to be mentioned?" asked Blanche, mockingly.

"It is too sacred for your lips!" he answered. "I see it all now; my eyes are opened. I know you used your will to keep me your willing captive. How may you not have persecuted her! Besides, when you say 'in that class,' Miss Delaval, you should remember you are speaking of an earl's grandchild."

"Who looked like a housemaid!"

"At least she had the generosity to go away to voluntary exile herself, rather than be an obstacle to what she thought your happiness."

"Well, she will soon come back, and then you can tell her how much your opinion has changed."

She was standing ready to leave the room. For one instant she looked into his eyes, but she saw there none of the old, passionate worship—nothing but suppressed scorn.

He had been her slave, but he was no longer. She made one supreme effort to win him back to bondage.

"Alan!"

No answer.

"Won't you speak to me?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Say good-bye!" she pleaded. "Alan, I have loved you better than anyone else in the world. Don't you think you are a little hard on me? Put your hand in mine, and tell me we part friends."

"I will not tell an untruth."

"You mean we are enemies!"

"I mean that we have been too much ever to be friends. Remember Byron's words:—

' If free from passion, which all friendship checks,
And your true feeling known and understood;
No friend like to a woman earth discovers,
So that you have not been—not shall be—lovers.'

"Then you won't forgive me!"

Those lovely eyes were bent upon his face, but they had lost their power.

"I hope you will be happy," he said, coldly. "Wealth seems the most precious thing in the world to you; therefore I recommend you to select a rich husband. I can't say any more. Some day, when I have ceased to remember all I thought you, I may be less hard upon what you are. Till then, I pray I may never see your face again!"

She did not reply. Whether his speech struck home—whether she was too heartless to mind—he did not know.

Another minute and he was standing there alone.

"False to the core!" he muttered. "And this is the creature to whom I sacrificed that poor child, and my plighted word! What would my uncle think of me if he knew we had made his grandchild so miserable that she preferred being alone in the world to staying in her rightful home. Oh! Dora, you little think how soon my punishment has begun!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WITHIN one week from that fatal Valentine's Day Castle St. Clare was closed. A competent steward was appointed to look after the estate. The Fanes returned to their own home; and the Earl went abroad to see what a long foreign tour would do towards helping him to forget the painful events of the last three months.

Before he left England he had a long talk with Herbert Cecil—the only friend to whom he confided the cruel words of Blanche Delaval.

"It will be months—perhaps years—before I return to England, old fellow!" said the Earl, earnestly. "Goodness knows, I have little enough to come for, except to see Bee and the children! I should be a pauper in my own land, but I can continue to get along very fairly abroad. For the sake of our friendship, and all the years you have known me, I ask one favour!"

"You have only to name it!"

"If that poor child ever returns—and some instinct tells me she is not dead—I want you to be kind to her."

"I will be a brother to her!"

"All the world will be against her. Tell her,

Bertie, that I found out my mistake—that in spite of everything, I think, if only Blanche Delaval had never returned toadden me with her arts, we should have been happy. Tell her no thought of my loss of fortune is to prevent her from enjoying her wealth; and that I pray, from the bottom of my heart, for her happiness!"

"I will tell her!"

And then Lord St. Clare went abroad. He spent the early spring in Italy, the summer in Switzerland, and the winter at Algiers. He saw everything worth seeing. He lived as a gentleman, and yet his income sufficed. The strange, roaming life had a charm of its own for him.

Absolutely no home news reached him. He purposely avoided the usual haunts of travellers, and so he met no fellow-countrymen; and he kept his own friends so utterly ignorant of his address that no letters came to recall England and his lost home to his mind.

He had been abroad almost a year. Christmas was drawing very near, when he chanced to take up an English paper. It was some weeks' old, and in the column devoted to such matters he saw the announcement of Blanche Delaval's wedding.

She had been married at Manchester, and her new name was Montgomery Smith. Alan gave a little sigh. He understood it all. Failing to secure rank and wealth, she had contented herself with the latter, and espoused a cotton lord.

"A year ago it would have pretty well killed me, and now my only feeling is a profound pity for Mr. Montgomery Smith. So Blanche is married! Then Bee's home is free to me again. Wandering is sorry work at this time of year. I will pack up my traps and go and spend Christmas at home!"

No sooner said than done—or than begun, to speak more correctly. Lord St. Clare wrote no letters to announce his coming; he wished to take people by surprise. And when he and his portmanteau crossed from Calais to Dover not one of his relations or friends even suspected that he had turned his face homewards.

He reached Dover in a thick fog—a fog so dense that it had delayed the vessel. Weary with travelling, and having no one's pleasure to consult but his own, Alan decided to spend a night at an hotel, and continue his journey the next morning. No one expected him, therefore no one could be alarmed.

But after his fatigue an English bed proved wonderfully alluring; and when Alan began his breakfast the next day it was suspiciously near the hour of the train's starting. He reached the station in time to see it steaming out of the platform.

"Another ten minutes, sir!" cried a porter consolingly.

But the next was a slow one, stopping at many intermediate stations; and Alan's patience bid fair to be exhausted before he was half-way to London. The winter sunshine, too, had disappeared, and yesterday's fog seemed to have returned with redoubled vigour. The train moved as slowly as a funeral procession. The Earl put his head out of the window at Mardon Junction, and asked irritably,

"Can't we go any faster? Why, man alive! you'll be hours on the road at this pace!"

The guard looked perplexed.

"It's a nasty journey, sir! I shouldn't wonder if the traffic was stopped altogether soon!"

"Well, I shall go to sleep!" decided Alan; "it's the only way to pass the time."

He fell asleep, and dreamed he was walking in a field with Blanche Delaval, and that as they suddenly came to the brink of the precipice she raised her fair white hands and pitched him over into the abyss beneath. He seemed to hear the awful thud with which he fell, then he awoke.

At first he thought the dream must really have been true. His recollection came back gradually and he realized that he was in the train, but he was lying on the floor of the carriage, which seemed to be on its side. Profound darkness reigned—even the lamp had gone out. There

was no sound to break the awful stillness, which seemed like a black, silent, living death.

There had been an accident, and in a tunnel—of that much Lord St. Clare felt certain. Would assistance never come? Should he die in that awful darkness, with no one to carry the news to his friends? Bee would shed sisterly tears when year after year passed without bringing back her brother! Captain Fane and Herbert Cecil would be heartily sorry; but only these three would mourn, and they would soon be comforted.

"Twenty-nine!" moaned Alan, half aloud. "Twenty-nine! and with no one in this world to care for me. Oh! Dora, child! If we had been married I think your little heart would have been sorry. I believe it would ache now in its womanly tenderness did it know my plight!"

He knew he had sustained some injury, for he could not move hand or foot, and there was an intolerable pain at his side. The agony seemed greater every minute; and at last, with one sigh, he passed into the merciful relief of unconsciousness.

When he came to himself he was lying in a room in which he had never been before. Everything in it was strange to him, but he was sure that he was in England. The simple iron bed, with its white hangings; the plain painted furniture; the dazzling clean linen blinds—all spoke of an English home.

How did he get here? Suddenly the whole scene came back to him—the darkness, the strange position of the carriage, the intolerable pain. He tried to move his arm—he felt the same agony. He knew then it was no dream; there had been an accident, and he was one of the victims.

He stirred uneasily, and at the sound a woman, who had been sewing near the window, and whom the curtains had hidden from his view, came forward—a plain, comfortable, motherly person, without anything interesting or remarkable about her.

With no unkindly touch she took the handkerchief on Alan's forehead, dipped it in eau de Cologne, and replaced it, saying—

"Do you feel any better?"

"I feel bad enough!" said Alan, ungraciously.

"My head burns like fire, and I can't move my arm an inch!"

"No; it is broken in two places!"

He groaned.

"How did I come here?"

"There was an accident to the down train, and as no one seemed to know anything about you, and the village inn was full, we had you brought here."

"It was very good of you, madam. May I ask to whose kindness I am indebted?"

"My name is Johnson; my husband is the station-master of Vale. The doctor said you were not to talk much; but if you will tell me the name of your friends I will send for them."

Alan shook his head.

"I would rather not. If I am in your way send me to the nearest hospital; but I have no friends who could come."

"No friends?"

"My sister is in very delicate health; there is no one else."

"Dear! dear! and you so young too. My man made sure there'd be a young wife and a few bairns a-wondering you didn't come home."

"There is no one to care!"

"You shouldn't say that, Mr. Clare; you're young yet, the wife and bairns may be in the future."

He had used the name of Clare in his travels as more suited to his modest means than his real title. He guessed—and guessed rightly—his kindly nurse had seen it on his luggage.

She said no more; and tired out with so much talking, Alan laid his head back wearily upon the pillow and fell asleep.

When he awoke again the short winter's day had closed in. The fire alone lighted the room, and his hostess had departed, perhaps to attend to her husband's evening meal. In her place sat a girl, whose back was turned to Alan, and who, her head resting on her arm, was almost unconsciously singing a low, sweet melody.

Lord St. Clare listened as one enchanted. Passionately fond of music, the rare beauty of the voice specially appealed to him in his weak state; besides, the girl was so utterly unconscious of his presence. The unstudied grace of her attitude, the simplicity with which she sang—evidently for her own pleasure—attracted his fancy. He began to wish she would turn her head; he wanted to see what face went with that voice.

He had his wish. The little kettle on the fire began to show signs of boiling over, and the girl rose to remove it. The flickering flames shone full upon her, making a picture Alan often looked back to in after years with a strange sense of pain.

She was rather tall and very slight, her figure almost fairy-like in its graceful proportions. She had soft, silky hair—the shade of a chestnut just uncovered from its shell; and this hair would not keep in bands, but waved and rippled on her forehead; the forehead itself was high and broad; the features remarkable for their purity and pathetic expression. But the crowning beauty of the face was the eyes—they were of a dark, intense blue, so large that they seemed to look you through and through, yet with nothing fierce or alarming, but with a world of tenderness in their depth, and a kind of passionate longing—an unsatisfied yearning.

Alan discovered all this in one long glance; then, being gratified in one desire, he formed another—that she would speak to him.

CHAPTER IX.

"It only rests with you to have London at your feet. You have the gift of genius, and if you use your powers success is certain!"

Those were Michael D'Arcy's words to his father's favourite pupil. The chorus-master of the Prince's Opera House had never managed to make a name in the musical world himself, but he knew talent when he saw it, and when Dora had finished her second song he was as certain of her future fame as though he had seen her standing on the stage half-smothered with bouquets.

The words seemed burned into Dora's brain. She was not pretty. According to Lord St. Clare she was worse than plain. She had made a great mistake. She had given away the treasure of her love to a man who had not one iota of affection for her. Hers was an empty tenure of life until this promise of fame came to gild it.

"You have scruples!" said D'Arcy, misundertstanding her silence. "You have been brought up to think theatres wrong—you dislike the thought of appearing on the stage!"

Dora's beautiful eyes flashed with excitement.

"I long for the moment to come!" she answered, quickly. "I have nothing but music to live for in the world. If you will only help me to an engagement I will bless you all my days!"

He smiled at her eagerness.

"I have brought out many a singer," he said, kindly, "but never one with a voice like yours, mademoiselle. You will take the world by storm!"

A long conversation followed. Dora told her position frankly. She had a little stock of ready money, enough to keep her a few months. She had no relations whom she need consult. Her future was emphatically her own, to dispose of how she would.

"You must go to Italy," said D'Arcy, promptly. "Six months at Naples, and you will have picked up all you need."

Dora hesitated.

"The money!" she said, frankly; "it would cost so much to go abroad!"

"Not an alarming amount. You must make a bargain with me, mademoiselle. I will advance sufficient money for your studies; and procure you an engagement at the Prince's Opera House on condition that you pay me a certain percentage of your salary—that is fair enough!"

But the innate honesty of the girl's nature made her hesitate.

"If I died!" she suggested, timidly; "if I lost my voice, Mr. D'Arcy, how should I repay you?"

"Tut, tut!" interposed Michael's better half. "We're not going to think of such dismal things! And now, what are we to call you?"

A crimson flush suffused the girl's face. Mrs. D'Arcy suspected nothing; her husband guessed a great deal.

"We must find you a grand stage name," he said, promptly. "People like something high-flown for an artiste. Beatrice di Sans Souci—now there's a splendid title!"

"It is too grand!"

"I like the name of Beatrice amazingly!" put in Mrs. D'Arcy. "I wish I had been called Beatrice D'Arcy!"

"It sounds well!" said the chorus-master, reflectively. "Mademoiselle, I look on you as a sort of legacy from my father. How would you like to take his name? I could do more for you if people believed I had an interest in your prosperity. When I introduce you to the manager of the Prince's Opera may it be in the character of my niece—Miss D'Arcy!"

The lonely wif agreed gratefully, and from that day she became part and parcel of the little family at 444, Colville-road. Mrs. D'Arcy gave up all idea of letting apartments. It had been difficult enough to keep people with the extreme musical tastes of the household, and now that there was someone to occupy the empty rooms, she calmly took the card out of the window altogether.

It was wonderful how soon Dora was domesticated at Camberwell—how at home she felt with the simple, kindly couple, who had sheltered her in the time of her necessity. Very early after her arrival she had been taken by Michael to the Prince's Opera House and introduced to the manager, Mr. Gordon. He heard her sing, and turned with a smile to his old subordinate.

"Your niece is, indeed, a *rara avis*. Remember, Michael, when she returns from Italy, she must make her *début* here. I shall consider it a personal injury if you allow any other house to have the monopoly of her talents."

"I am going to send her to Naples in April," returned Michael D'Arcy. "Next spring, sir, I may remind you of your offer."

"Mademoiselle," said the manager, turning suddenly to Dora, "remember one thing in your training—to succeed you must be not only a singer but an actress. An actress must have fire and passion. Young English ladies are generally too cold and self-contained. Remember you must learn to feel, and to show us what you feel!"

The girl raised her speaking eyes to his face.

"I think I feel too much," she said, simply; and then, at a sign from D'Arcy, she left the gentlemen alone, and set off to return to Camberwell and Colville-road.

"She will do," said Gordon, slowly. "She will improve every day she lives, or I am mistaken!"

"Her appearance is against her," returned D'Arcy, a little regretfully; "she looks nothing but a timid little school-girl."

"She will be a beautiful woman."

"Beautiful! Sir, she has no promise of it, yet."

"She has every promise of it! Her charms are not developed, that is all. That girl will break many a heart; she has it in her face!"

The manager did not see Dora again. Very early in April Michael D'Arcy obtained a brief holiday, and escorted his self-constituted ward to Naples. Here he made arrangements for her to board with a musical family and attend the Conservatoire. An experienced tragedian was to give her lessons in acting.

"How can I ever thank you!" said the girl, as she said him good-bye.

"Success!" was the brief answer. "You have it in you. Let us be proud of our Beatrice!"

So utterly cut off from her old life and associations, as far removed from Pennington as from Castle St. Clare, with new friends, new surroundings, even a new name, the girl who had once expected to be Countess of St. Clare worked and studied with a zeal, an energy which knew no bounds, to succeed in her profession to gratify kind-hearted Michael D'Arcy.

Such was her ambition. For all time she must live apart from those nearest to her in blood; for all time there would be an aching void in her heart. Fame might, perhaps, fill that void. She would at least try.

Six months had been fixed for her stay in Naples, and in the short October days she returned to England. This time she travelled alone, under the care of a family who were going to Dover.

When she reached Victoria-station the first object she saw was Michael D'Arcy, a roll of music under his arm, his kindly face full of benevolent pleasure; but the matron took no notice of Dora. At last, in despair, she went up to him, and laid one hand upon his arm.

"Don't you know me, uncle?"

They had taught her to call them uncle and aunt in the few weeks she lived with them. Michael started at the sound of her voice, and stared like a person in a dream.

"Am I so much altered?" asked the girl, gently. "I thought you would be pleased to see me!"

"My dear child!" he said, quaintly; "you have been transformed as much as ever was Cinderella in the fairy tale! Do you never look in a glass?"

"Sometimes!"

"And what do you see?"

"That I have grown older and more womanly."

"I see something else! My dear, when you went away you were a little unframed school-girl—now you are a beautiful woman!"

"Uncles shouldn't flatter!"

"It is the truth! You will find plenty of people ready to tell you so, my dear."

And Michael was right. Miss Minx's awkward pupil—the girl whom Lord St. Clare had declared to be positively without a single attraction—had blossomed into a woman about whose loveliness there could be no question.

Above the middle height, of a slight, graceful figure, her face was yet her chief charm. Her complexion was pure and delicate; her large dark blue eyes were fringed with long, dark lashes; her chestnut hair waved naturally, and was thrown back to show her broad, white forehead.

It was a face people would pause to look at in a crowd. The smile was rare, but full of sweetness; the expression of the eyes had a haunting pathos, beautiful and fascinating to a degree. Dowered with a voice of wondrous power, a brilliant career must be before her; and Michael felt triumphant as he handed her into a cab, till he remembered the manager's prophecy.

"She will break many a heart!"

About that Michael cared but little. He regarded the young men of the present day as having hearts made of some new patent material warranted not to break or even crack. But how about her own? He knew enough of genius to be aware it was often allied to a highly sensitive, nervous nature.

What if this beautiful girl, who seemed so strangely thrown upon his care, should have her life's happiness wrecked upon the quicksands of disappointment?

"My dear!" he said simply, as they drove along. "I hope you will be happy."

"I shall be happy if I may sing," she answered, gently. "Oh, Uncle D'Arcy! I think if I lost my voice I should die! It is all I have left to live for!"

444, Colville-road, was little changed. Mrs. D'Arcy, in a brilliant new cap, welcomed the wanderer enthusiastically.

"My dear!" exclaimed the good woman. "Italy must be the place to make people beautiful for ever. I never saw anyone so improved!"

They were alone in Dora's room. The girl hid her face on Mrs. D'Arcy's motherly breast.

"Aunt," she said, in a trembling voice, "will you answer me one question? When I came here on that cold February morning, and you saw me first, did you think me very ugly?"

Mrs. D'Arcy was a little taken aback.

"I didn't think you pretty," she replied at

length. "I don't believe I ever thought about it. I remember you reminded me of a little tired child—someone so weak and gentle—that oughtn't to be running about the world alone."

"And you didn't hate me because I was ugly!"

Mrs. D'Arcy shook her head energetically.

"You were not ugly, my dear! People would not have called you pretty, perhaps; but there was a sort of look in your face that went to my heart; and for all you're so altered and improved the same look's there just the same now."

"Italy was very nice. But oh! I am glad to be back in England. I want to be at work."

"Well, there's plenty of work before you, my dear. Michael talks of your singing at a few concerts before you come out just to give you courage."

But when Mr. Gordon saw Miss D'Arcy he emphatically negatived this course.

"She has fulfilled my prophecy," he said to his old friend, smiling; "and I venture to predict she will make a name, but no one must see her until she comes out in opera. It is almost a pity you didn't keep her in Italy a while longer."

Michael D'Arcy laughed at the desire. He was very proud of his adopted niece, and he liked to hear the manager praise her; but he had no idea of keeping Beatrice shut up for the four or five months before her services would be required at the Prince's Opera House, which establishment became a theatre pure and simple during the winter.

The musician had a large circle of friends, but very few people came to the little house in the Colville-road.

D'Arcy was a welcome guest everywhere, but he was not fond enough of society to accept many invitations, and so his acquaintances had almost ceased to give them. He preferred spending his leisure at home, practising his favourite art, or setting songs to music, in which he was quite an expert.

All the rising poets of the day were proud to have their words accompanied by the rich, sweet melodies which seemed to float like magic through the musician's brain.

Mrs. D'Arcy was not musical, although, as she often expressed in, she was "steeped in music up to the eyebrows."

No, she was not in the least musical; seeing the many people who called to engage her husband's talents for their verses bothered her.

Callers who knew nothing of Michael D'Arcy personally, somehow never conceived a great opinion of his genius after an interview with his wife.

"My dear," she said to Beatrice, as Dora now was styled, "they badger me; they will talk about metres and strophes till they make my head ache. Why can't they come when Michael's at home?"

"Let me see them," offered our heroine. "I will let them rave about metres and strophes to their hearts' content, so that they are persuaded uncle's music is just the sort for them."

Mrs. D'Arcy accepted readily, and whenever a stranger appeared henceforward it was always the beautiful songstress who received them.

She never uttered a note—she never spoke of herself or her own art—but she listened to their hopes and wishes; and one and all went away persuaded that "Miss D'Arcy fully appreciated genius, although she might not be musical herself."

Then when she had been in England a fortnight, as she sat reading in the little front parlour, a card was brought her, inscribed,—

"Herbert Cecil."

In one moment the girl's heart seemed to stand still. She was wafted back again in memory to the winter before. She seemed to see again the tasteful furniture of Castle St. Clare. In fancy she sat in the grand old library, and heard a man's rich, deep voice beg her acceptance of a wedding-gift.

Ah! what strange charms had life had for her when she last saw Herbert Cecil!

She was within three days of her bridal, and now all thought of that was over. Never, she felt in her heart of hearts, would orange blossoms

encircle her brow—never would bells ring out a joyous peal for her. She thought time and separation had done their work. She had fondly hoped Alan St. Clare's image no longer filled her heart. Alas! she discovered her mistake. The very sound of his friend's name stirred her deepest feelings.

He came in, the same courteous, high-bred man she remembered.

Ah! how the recollection of his kindness to the little unwelcome relation thrilled her. She wondered if he would recognize her. She need not have feared.

Herbert started as he entered, but not because he traced any resemblance in her to Dora Clifford—only because the vision which presented itself seemed to him the fairest he had ever seen.

She bowed; he did not know her; that at least filled her with relief.

"I think there is some mistake," said Herbert, simply. "I came to see Mr. D'Arcy."

"He will be home in half-an-hour. If you have come upon business, and cannot wait to see him, perhaps you will entrust me with a message!"

"I will wait," he said, simply. "Not that I doubt your powers as ambassador, but because Mr. D'Arcy and I are old friends."

"You know my uncle!"

"I have known Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy for years. I was not aware they possessed a niece."

The door opened, and Mrs. D'Arcy appeared. She wore her best and brightest cap—pink with yellow flowers; one glance at that, and Dora knew that Mr. Cecil was an honoured guest.

"To think of it being you!" exclaimed Mrs. D'Arcy, wringing the author's hand nearly off, "and I believed it was some grand stranger. We have lots of strangers now-a-days. Mike sets so many songs to music I'm sure I wonder he can think of any fresh ones. You see our niece has come home to liven us up a bit."

"I have been telling Miss D'Arcy what a surprise it is to me to find her here!"

"And your coming is a surprise too! Mr. Cecil is a great writer, Beatrice; and he picked your uncle out of a ditch one day in the country years and years ago, and they've been friends ever since."

"I was only a lad then, Miss D'Arcy; it is almost fifteen years ago."

"Well, I'm glad you've come!" assented her hostess. "We see no one now, Mr. Cecil, who isn't musical, and I get a little tired. Singing's all very well, but talking's a great deal better. You'll stay to tea, of course!"

"I shall be delighted."

He looked at Miss D'Arcy, but her eyes were bent on the ground. She was wondering if he had seen Alan lately, wondering yet more if he had been best man at Alan's marriage. No doubt that was quite an old affair now.

"And you're not been near us for a year!" cried Mrs. D'Arcy, reproachfully. "That's what you call friendship. Ah! I know you; you like your lords and ladies better than us plain folks."

"I don't know many lords, Mrs. D'Arcy. In fact, I am only intimate with one, and he was an old schoolfellow of mine."

Miss D'Arcy looked up—she fixed her beautiful eyes upon Herbert's face.

"I like to hear of old schoolfellows meeting again; it proves there is such a thing as friendship."

"And have you ever doubted it!"

"Just enough to be glad it is proved. I think no friendship can be equal to one made in youth."

But Herbert said no more respecting his friend; instead, he drew Dora out on the subject of Italy; he himself knew Naples well, and very soon the conversation became quite a *blé-à-blé*; and Mrs. D'Arcy, seeing she could be spared, went off to order a "relish" to supplement the family tea.

When Michael D'Arcy entered, the manager's prophecy rang in his ears. Beatrice sat on a low chair by the fire; Herbert was opposite. He seemed already to hang upon her words—already his grave, thoughtful face seemed to yearn for a

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smile from the beautiful one kept so persistently in the shade.

"Why are you sitting in the dark?" demanded the master of the house. "Beatrice, my dear! run and send someone to light the gas."

The two men shook hands. Perhaps Herbert was a little vexed at the interruption of his enjoyment, but he never showed it.

"You have a treasure I little suspected!" he said, simply. "Where has Miss D'Arcy been hidden all the times I have visited you?"

"She was at school for years, and then in Italy. Beatrice has no time for society, Mr. Cecil; she is studying for the stage."

"The stage!" in pained surprise.

"And why not?" a little indignantly. "She is beautiful enough to succeed without thinking of her voice. It is quite a secret at present, but I can trust an old friend like you. She makes her *début* in the spring as Amilia in *La Sonnambula*."

Before he left Herbert managed to ask the girl how she liked her profession.

"I adore it!" she answered. "I think nothing could make me happier."

"It will be a hard life."

"It will be a life of work! I could not lead a rapid, aimless existence, Mr. Cecil; it would kill me."

"I don't like to hear you say so."

"Why?"

"With your face," he said, gravely, "you were meant to be the queen of a happy home. There are women enough to command the admiration of the many. There is something that should be more precious to a true woman than the mere applause of the multitudes."

She never attempted to misunderstand him.

"You mean love?"

He bowed his head.

"It is a great mistake," said the beautiful stranger. "They say love is the crown and glory of a woman's life, Mr. Cecil; and yet in nearly all the histories one hears it brings only pain."

"You are not speaking from experience, I am sure!"

"I am speaking from conviction. I have not heard a great many love stories, but in every one that I remember one heart ached at every peal of marriage bells."

"Your theory is a strange one!"

"Is it? I think it is very simple! A loves B, B loves C, and C loves A; that is how life generally goes."

"This is heresy. What happiness can there be in such cross purposes as that?"

"I suppose it is not always so. There may be exceptions, but generally of every pair at the altar one loves, the other is loved; that is all the difference."

"Which shall you do?"

"Neither!"

"You speak positively!"

"I shall never love anyone except my art—that is enough to fill my life."

"Then music is more absorbing than literature. I too, love my art, dearly, but it does not fill all my life; it does not prevent me having many lonely hours."

"Then come and spend them here!" cried Mrs. D'Arcy, hospitably. She had entered the room in time only to hear the latter part of the sentence. "You will always be welcome, Mr. Cecil, if we are not too musical for you to put up with."

"Thanks!" he said, lightly. "I will take you at your word. If I come too often you will have to turn me out."

From that night forward he was constantly at Colville-road. In the beginning, Michael D'Arcy had a few qualms respecting Dora.

"It would be a thousand pities for her to fall in love with Herbert Cecil," he told his wife. "It would be the failure of her career. He would never suffer his wife to be on the stage."

"He will never marry one," returned Mrs. D'Arcy, with conviction. "And I am quite sure nothing would induce our Beatrice to give up the stage."

And then Michael, having relieved his conscience, let things take their course. Herbert

found more time on his hands than anyone would have believed possible for such a prolific writer, and all his leisure was spent with the musical little household.

No one suspected the real motive of his visits, least of all the object of them. After that first evening Dora was perfectly at home with Mr. Cecil—the fear of being recognized had quite died out. He had an interest in her eyes as Alan's friend. Besides, he seemed a sort of link between her and the past. Through him she hoped to hear some news of the man who had treated her so heartlessly; some mention of the home which might have been hers. She never thought of love in connection with Mr. Cecil. Dora's own heart was so filled with Alan's image that she never guessed a second offer of marriage would come to her, much less from one who had known her long ago.

(To be continued.)

"HERE'S an awful thing in this paper," said the Edinburgh dame, "about burglars at Glasgow binding and gagging a woman while her husband stood by without offering the slightest assistance." "Perhaps he thought they were capable of doing it unaided," replied her spouse unguardedly.

"Yes," remarked the globe-trotter, "I've been everywhere, seen many queer sights, and had lots of fun; but I've also been in a good many tight places." "While I've never travelled much," rejoined his companion, "I've had some gay old times, been tight in a good many places, and have incidentally seen some mighty queer things."

STRANGER: "I have come, sir, to marry your daughter." MILLIONAIRE: "Eh! Wha?" STRANGER: "A million or two will be necessary to make us comfortable, and of course you will give it. Shall I leave my bag here while I go to present myself to your daughter?" MILLIONAIRE (bewildered): "Have you credentials in your bag?" STRANGER: "No; nothing but dynamite."

"FRANCES," said the little girl's mamma, who was entertaining callers, "you came downstairs so nobly that you could be heard all over the house. Go back and come down the stairs like a lady." Frances retired, and after the lapse of a few minutes re-entered the room. "Did you hear me come downstairs this time, mamma?" "No, dear. I am glad you came down quietly. How did you manage to come down like a lady the second time?" "I slid down the banisters."

AN Edinburgh University professor, who is abnormally rotund, boarded a tramcar the other day, the last empty seat of which he managed to occupy. Two ladies entered, and looked anxiously round for places to be vacated in their favour. The professor, unwilling to rise, gazed reprovingly at a small boy and whispered: "Why don't you get up and give a lady your seat?" "Not likely!" restored the boy, to the amazement of all; "why don't you get up and give them both a seat?"

THEY had been married seven years. The doctor had been called in, and pronounced him a very sick man. As his wife entered the room after the doctor's visit he called her to his bedside, and in a tremulous voice he remarked: "Darling, I am going." Leaning over him, she stroked his head gently, and reminiscently replied: "Cheer up, Clarence! That remark assures me that you will live. Don't you remember how often you said that during our courtship days, and how persistently you didn't go?"

HAVING won the battles of Omdurman and Atbara, and recovered from his wounds, the young hero returned to his home in Bristol only to find Edith married to another. "So after all your vows, you forget me!" he exclaimed, with much bitterness. The girl hung her head guiltily. "Yes," she faltered; and then she added, with great vehemence: "That comes of trusting to my memory. I should have made a man!" Ah, but it was too late to think of that now!

THE stage-manager of one of the Glasgow theatres was well-known for his impetuous and hasty temper. On one occasion a drama was put on in which a snowstorm occurred. Some men were sent up into the flies with brown-paper bags filled with little pieces of white paper which they let fall to represent the snow. Suddenly the shower stopped. "Whaur's your snow?" roared the stage-manager. "We has nee mair white paper," came a loud whisper from above. "Then snew broon, ye fools, snew broon," was the manager's response.

MR. JONES was rather late in coming home to tea. By way of explanation he said to his wife: "I just looked in at the Royal Institution—Prof. Dryasdust on the atmosphere, you know." "I daresay," replied his wife, "anything that has a spice of danger about it attracts you, and if Prof. Darrow had fallen off and broken his neck I should consider you had helped to cause his death by paying to witness the exhibition. Only last week you went to see the high dive into a tank—coffin I call it; these sensational things ought to be stopped."

SOCIETY.

THE King of Greece delights in taking recreation in the fields. He can plough, cut and bind corn, milk cows, and, in short, could at a pinch keep a farm going single-handed.

WINDSOR CASTLE will in future be protected by an electric fire alarm system connecting the Royal residence with the houses of Palace officials, and with the fire brigade and police stations at Henry the Eighth's Gate.

PRINCE LOUIS OF BATTENBERG has obtained an appointment at the Admiralty, and while he holds this post the Princess will spend the greater part of each year in England. Princess Louis and her children have gone to Balmoral on a visit to the Queen.

THE Queen has graciously given her patronage to an exhibition and sale of Irish industries to be held in the Ulster Hall, Belfast, in December next. Lord Arthur Hill is making the necessary arrangements, and Countess Cadogan will open the sale.

THE Queen will leave Balmoral on her return to Windsor Castle, on Friday, the 10th inst., and Her Majesty's visit to Bristol will take place towards the close of the following week, probably on Friday the 17th. The Queen is to stay at Windsor until within a few days of Christmas, when the Court will remove to Osborne for two months.

SPANISH and French women of the higher class are usually expert swordswomen. They are taught to fence as carefully and accurately as their brothers, and there are numerous schools in the two countries where young women are taught not only to fence but to handle the broadsword.

THE baby daughter of the Tsar and Tzaritsa has been christened Maria Nicolaevna. Like a fairy princess, she was conveyed from the palace to the church in a gilt coach drawn by six white horses. Among other sponsors were Prince George of Greece and Prince Henry of Hesse, with the baby's grandmother, the Empress Maria. The Empress herself was not present, a curious custom of the Greek church prohibiting the attendance of the child's mother.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia occupied a suite of three apartments on the first floor, and facing the front of the palace, during their stay at Bernstorff. The sitting room is furnished with old oak and mahogany, and the hangings and coverings are of claret-coloured silk. The Emperor transacted his business there in the morning and at night, a courier arriving every day from St. Petersburg. The Emperor usually played lawn tennis for an hour before luncheon with Princess Victoria of Wales and Princess Christian of Denmark.

THE German Crown Prince, who will next year attain his legal majority, has now the right to wear no less than six different uniforms, as he is *à la suite* of regiments in Prussia, Saxony, Württemberg, Bavaria, Russia, and Austria, and is also attached to the 1st Regiment of Prussian Foot Guards, with which he will later do duty. Next year his Imperial Highness will take part in the army manoeuvres and from the time he has completed his eighteenth year, on May 6th, 1900, he will be present in an official capacity at many state functions.

THE family party assembled at Bernstorff was much larger this year than has been the case for several years, as the presence of the Tsar and Tzaritsa with their three children made a great difference in the arrangements. Bernstorff is very small in comparison to Fredensborg, but since the death of the late Tsar, Fredensborg has not been so much used, and all the family parties since that event have met at Bernstorff. The life led by the Royal Family of Denmark is very simple. Almost everyone rises early, and most of the Princesses have their breakfast in their private apartments and do not meet the rest of the family until the midday meal. The Princess of Wales, who has always been her father's favourite child, generally spends a great deal of her time with him, walking and driving, and her Royal Highness also very much appreciates having her sister, the Dowager Tsarina, with her.

STATISTICS.

THE farthest distance a cricket-ball has ever been thrown is 140 yards.

THE value of the average annual production of the earth has been estimated at £2,000,000,000.

Fewer deaths are caused by mining accidents now than in 1855, although at the present time there are two and a-half times as many people employed underground.

GEMS.

LIFE is continually weighing us in very sensitive scales and tells every one of us precisely what his real weight is to the last grain of dust.

STUDYING human nature from a disinterested point of view is one thing. Remarking its rise and fall from an interested standpoint is another.

THAT inexhaustible good nature, which is the most precious gift of heaven, spreading its self like oil over the troubled sea of thought, and keeping the mind smooth and equable in the roughest weather.

IF we deliberately set to work to contravene any of nature's laws we shall inevitably secure our own deserved defeat. But if we study them to discover their real meaning, which is always one of ultimate beneficence and progress, and if we cherish the same aims, applying to them methods appropriate to ourselves, we shall be at one with her and assist her in the elimination of evil without sacrificing any of the warm and kindly sentiments that honour our humanity.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED RICE AND SULTANAS.—Boil some rice in water for twenty minutes as for curry; then in plenty of boiling water. Strain, mix some sultanas and sugar with the rice; put all in a cloth, tie up, and boil for two hours. Turn out, and serve with butter and sugar or golden syrup.

PLUM JAM.—Four pounds plums, four pounds sugar, one and a-half breakfast cups water; if the plums are large they may be pricked over or even have the stones removed; put the sugar and water in the preserving pan, and stir till the sugar boils; then put in the plums, and when it boils up boil gently half an hour; skim and pot; damson jam is made the same way.

BREAD CAKE.—Ingredients: Six ounces of stale bread, half a pint of boiling milk, two ounces raisins, one ounce candied-peel, two eggs, two ounces each flour, butter, and sugar. Pour the boiling milk over the bread, cover closely and let stand till the bread is soft. Put into a strainer and press out all the milk you can. Put the bread in a basin. Add the flour, butter, sugar, raisins, and peel—chopped fine—and a very little allspice. Stir all well together, taking out any hard pieces of bread. Beat the eggs thoroughly, stir in, adding more milk if necessary, and bake in a well-buttered pie-dish in a moderate oven for one and a-half hours.

FLAKY PASTRY.—Ingredients: Half-pound flour, four ounces butter or dripping, half a teaspooonful salt, water. Divide the butter into four equal parts, and rub a fourth of it into the flour; then mix it to a paste with a little water. Roll it out into a long strip. Spread over the strip the second quarter of butter, and shake over a little flour; then fold it evenly in three, pressing the edges together with the rolling-pin. Roll out again, and proceed as before. Repeat this process until the four divisions of the butter have been used. The amount of butter used may be increased or decreased according to the required richness of the pastry.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Tibetans have a week of five days, named after iron, wood, water, feathers, and earth.

EXPERIMENTS to reproduce dead men's features from their skulls are being made in Germany.

THERE are said to be fewer suicides among miners than among any other class of workmen.

RUG-WEAVING is an art older than the Pharaohs, and the history of the first loom lies shrouded in oblivion.

THERE are millions of the inhabitants of the Philippines Islands who never knew the dominion of Spain and never saw a Spaniard.

A RECENT find of a set of ivory pins, a little gateway, and three balls, indicates that the Egyptians played ninepins quite 5,000 years ago.

ELECTRICITY has now, it seems, beaten the record of the goldbeater, and can produce a foil of metal from 5 to 10 times thinner than ordinary gold leaf.

THE most elaborate experiments that have so far been made in aerial propulsion show that the screw is the device which exerts the greater propulsive power in the air.

AMONG the rarest of precious stones the green garnet is probably the most valuable. This gem is of a superb, rich shade, far more brilliant than that of the emerald.

THE Japanese are now getting used to glass. At first the glass in railway carriage windows had to be smeared with streaks of white paint, to keep passengers from poking their heads through it.

IN every city or town in the Netherlands you will find a Rosemary-street. In olden days only undertakers lived in them, the rosemary being, in the language of flowers, specially dedicated to the dead.

A SHELLFISH known as the plants in the Mediterranean has the curious power of spinning a viscous silk, which is made in Italy into a regular fabric. The silk is spun by the shell-fish in the first place for the purpose of attaching itself to the rocks.

OWING to the cheap quality of paper used for Chinese newspapers, and to the low price of labour, both literary and mechanical, the native papers are issued at an extremely small figure. The price of an ordinary Shanghai journal is four cash, or about one-tenth of a penny.

THE Eiffel Tower is being put in readiness for the Exposition. It is to be given a coat of enamel paint in five shades, graded from lemon-chrome on the summit to deep orange on the pedestal. Two coats will be applied, for which nearly fifty tons of enamel will be required.

IN China when a man writes a letter, he does not drop it in a mail box as we do here, but takes it to a letter-shop, where he makes a bargain with the keeper of the shop, to have it carried for him. It costs a great deal to have a letter carried, and not many people can afford to write them.

SMOKE-TINTED spectacles are worn by the cattle which range the snow covered hills of Russia. It was discovered that the glare caused by sunlight on the snow made them blind, and spectacles were fitted to them to protect their sight as they plucked the grass which sprouted through the earth's white mantle.

YANKEE ingenuity has succeeded in finally solving the supposedly unsolvable problem of making a Japanese typewriter. The sheets of paper that ran through them will be covered with characters as old as the pyramids. Typewriters are so essentially a modern invention that their use in connection with a language that was in existence centuries before English was spoken will be striking to the extreme. So many characters are required in the Japanese language that it seemed an impossibility to adapt it to a typewriter, but the free use of shift keys has done it. The Japanese run their lines from the top to the bottom of the page, and this was another difficulty, but it was settled.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. K.—A child is born with the nationality of its parents.

E. G.—The same person may act as executor and as witness to a will.

CLAUDE.—The battle of Isandula was fought on January 22nd, 1879.

IGNORANT.—An octocore is the offspring of a quadroon and a white person—one-eighth negro blood.

NAMELESS.—An illegitimate child may marry in the name by which it has been customarily known.

EVELYN.—You know your own capacity; something depends on that, and a good deal on the teacher.

HOUSEWIFE.—A very little milk in tepid water is excellent for wiping off painted doors and oil-cloths.

CURIOS.—The word "boycott" was adopted from the name of Captain Boycott, less than twenty years ago.

L. M.—The Duke of Clarence died on January 14th, 1892. The Prince Imperial was killed in Zululand on June 1st, 1879.

RALPH.—The Volunteer movement was begun in Scotland in May, 1859, when the 1st Western Regiment was organised in Glasgow.

S. L.—A husband cannot obtain a separation order from his wife, but he can refuse to live with her on condition that he maintains her elsewhere.

GERALD.—Let it go to a reprievor. You cannot expect an amateur to know as much about it as one whose business it is to know the work and do it well.

ELRIC.—The eldest son of the reigning sovereign is by custom created Prince of Wales, whether or not his father or mother occupied the throne at the date of his birth.

CISPY.—Use cold cream on the face at night, and wash it clean after being in the salt water with fresh rainwater. Lemon and elderflower water is often used if there are freckles.

ESTHER.—Two cups of sugar; two tablespoonsful of water, and a piece of butter the size of an egg. Boil without stirring until it hardens on a spoon. Pour on buttered plates to cool.

PRETTY FOLL.—Parrots may best be taught to talk by covering the cage at night, or rather in the evening, and by then repeating to them slowly and distinctly the words you desire to teach them.

V. W.—On writing to Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., you will get printed information in detail about the examinations, with details and places of next competitions.

PURZEE.—A pariah is an outcast—one of the lowest class of people in Hindostan. They have, properly speaking, no caste, and are supposed to be descended from race long since conquered by foreign invaders.

A. H.—Rub the spot with turpentine. This will gradually soften the paint, and with a blunt knife you will be able to scrape it off. The grease left by the turpentine must be removed by rubbing the spots with benzine.

ANXIOS.—We are of opinion that going out to Canada in September is altogether too late; but write on the whole subject to Government Emigrants' Information Office, St. Broadway, London, S.W., and take the advice the officials there give.

MARY.—Dip them into boiling water for a second before beginning. An excellent plan is to put them into a frying-basket for the dipping part of the programme, as the water drains from them so nicely; and as left to get sodden they are spoilt.

LELIA.—You should have each water of the same temperature; do not pour water on the dry garments, but put the garments into the prepared water; dissolve the soap in the water instead of rubbing it on the garments, and wash as quickly as possible.

NORA.—Most certainly tell your mother about your friend, and let her decide whether you are to see anything more of him or no. You are both so young that it is at present nothing but a friendship, and not likely to grow into anything more for a time, if at all.

BUDDY.—Thoroughly clean and refill every time after using. If you allow dirt and oil to accumulate on it, it will smell unpleasantly when lighted. Do not cut the wick, but rub off the charred part with a rag. Always turn the wick down low before extinguishing it.

KATE.—The following paste is excellent for the purpose: Mix together one gill of paraffin, half a gill of asphaltum, and enough tripoli powder to make a rather soft paste. Apply with a bit of felt, rub till all dirt is removed, dust with dry tripoli powder, and polish with a soft cloth.

WORRIED HOUSEKEEPER.—You might try spraying their holes with a strong solution of carbolic acid. Two tablespoonsful of the acid to a pint of water is the right proportion. If the holes are sprayed with this every two or three days for a fortnight the pests will doubtless disappear.

E. K.—Lord Raglan was the General in command of the British forces in the Crimea, the Duke of Cambridge was General of the brigade which included the so-called Highland division commanded by Sir Colin Campbell, which charged the Russians off the heights, and gained Alma.

ANNE.—Fratten pack thread lines near the ceiling of a cool room. Pick the grapes before they are dead ripe; cut out all decayed ones, and do not let their juice touch those that remain; seal the extremity of the stalk, and hang the bunches on the pack thread. Pears may be kept in the same way.

QUESTION.—It is exceedingly bad form to write anything of a private nature on a post-card. In their right place post-cards are a great boon, but they should only be used for messages which one would not mind having proclaimed from the housetops, and all endorsements should be omitted.

DOUBTFUL.—If on leaving the water your lips turn blue, the teeth chatter, your fingers feel numb, and you are cold and chilly for a long time after, it points to a weak heart or weak circulation, and you must give up cold baths. If you have headache and great languor following your bath, this points to the same trouble.

CLAUDE.—Get a glass jar with an air-tight cover; half fill with cream; put the cover firmly on and shake vigorously. A tiny pinch of salt helps to make it turn, and the cream should be cooled as much as possible before being put into the jar. Watch it carefully as you shake it, for if shaken too long it will turn to butter.

HESITATION.—From all you tell us, a marriage between you seems a most suitable arrangement. Assuming that there is no other reason standing in your way than the very frail one you mention, we seriously advise you to put it aside and give the gentleman the answer that he desires.

DOUFER.—Roulette is a game of chance, in which a small ball is made to move round rapidly in a circle divided off into numbered red and black squares, the one on which it stops indicating the results of the wagers permitted by the game. Roulette is a French word meaning a little wheel or ball.

RON.—Albinos are found among all races. They occur most frequently among nations of dark skins and living in hot climates. In the copper-coloured races they are more rare, and still more so among whites. It is not accurately known what it is that occasions albinism. It is not limited to man, but has a wide range among the lower orders of creation.

MEMORY'S GARDEN.

It matters not what the years shall bring me,
Whether of happiness, peace or pain,
The old days I treasure in Memory's garden.
Have passed away, nor will come again.
Those sweet glad hours we spent together,
Alike in sunshine, or snow, or rain.

Why heed the weather? Our hearts were merry.
Why notice shadows? Our path lay bright.
It all seemed then a content so endless,
A joyous day, ne'er to sink in night.
Now, buried here in Stygian darkness,
Present and future no ray of light.

But I hold the past in my memory's garden,
And none can steal it, and none destroy.
Watered by tears are my lovely blossoms
Shedding the fragrance of bygone joy.
So bravely I'll face the dull grey future,
Those days are mine, and held no alloy.

S. S.—Brush the felt till all the dust is removed, and then sponge with ammonia and boiling water. The proportion of strong liquid ammonia is one tablespoonful to the same quantity of water. Rub this on the hat thoroughly, and then set it on a table, or other flat surface, to dry, for if this is not done the brim is certain to get out of shape.

GOOD FORM.—Invitations for dinners, lunch parties, evening parties, or any formal entertainment where a hostess must provide food and seating accommodation for her guests, should be answered immediately, in order that she may plan for such in advance, and also supply guests in place of those who do not accept her invitation.

EUNICE.—Such a stain can be completely taken out by first damping the cloth, sprinkling carbonate of soda on the part, rolling up the garment loosely and laying aside all night, next day rinse; then lay out to bleach, sprinkling more carbonate on and watering from time to time as needed; more than one day's bleaching may be required.

L. R.—A generation is the interval of time that elapses between the birth of a father and the birth of his son, and was generally used in computing considerable periods of time, both in sacred and profane history. Thirty-three years have usually been allowed as the mean length of a generation, or three generations for every hundred years.

L. D.—A good method of cleaning ivory is to take a piece of fresh lime; shake it by sprinkling it with water; then mix into a paste, which apply by means of a soft brush, brushing well into the interstices of the carving; next set it by in a warm place until perfectly dry, after which take another soft brush and remove the dust.

WORRIED HOUSEKEEPER.—You might try spraying their holes with a strong solution of carbolic acid. Two tablespoonsful of the acid to a pint of water is the right proportion. If the holes are sprayed with this every two or three days for a fortnight the pests will doubtless disappear.

E. K.—Lord Raglan was the General in command of the British forces in the Crimea, the Duke of Cambridge was General of the brigade which included the so-called Highland division commanded by Sir Colin Campbell, which charged the Russians off the heights, and gained Alma.

NESTA.—The privilege is reserved to ladies in order to protect them from annoyance; as in company many casual introductions are made to persons with whom it may not be desirable to keep up an acquaintance. If the lady desires to have no further acquaintance with persons so introduced, she will, of course, make no recognition upon next meeting.

A. L.—Pig iron is so called because the ingots of iron when first made have a fancied resemblance to a litter of pigs in the act of sucking. When iron is produced from the ore, the red-hot metal runs from the furnace down a straight channel, having at intervals side branches about four feet long, into which the metal gradually flows, finally filling up the main channel and these offshoots. In this state it greatly resembles a huge double-side comb, and is called by the workmen the "sow and pig." When broken up into ingots, in which shape it appears in the markets, it is known as "pig iron" or "pig."

ESTD.—One pound flour, one pound butter, one pound sugar, fifteen eggs, two pounds currants, one pound sultanas, one pound mixed peel, half-pound ground almonds, one large teaspoonful cinnamon, one large teaspoonful baking powder. Mix the butter and sugar together to a cream, then drop in the eggs one by one, beating each till quite smooth—this ensures that the cake gets a good half-hour's beating—then add the flour, the fruit, the spice, and the baking powder, and bake in a ring. This makes one story if a large cake is wanted. Double all the ingredients and that makes a large round. If a small cake, take half of all, which makes a smaller round. It ought to be kept for several weeks before using.

MINT.—Take a table-spoonful of alum and dissolve it in enough lukewarm water to rinse a print dress. Dip the soiled dress into it, taking care to wet thoroughly every part of it, and then wring it out. Have warm, not hot, suds all ready, and wash out the dress quickly; then rinse it in cold water. Have the starch ready, but not too hot; rinse the dress in it, wring it out, and hang it wrong side out to dry, but not in the sun. Place it where the wind will strike it rather than the sun. When dry, iron directly. Prints should never be sprinkled; but if allowed to become rough-dry, they should be ironed under a damp cloth. It is better to wash them some day by themselves, when washing and ironing can be done at once.

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